

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 899.

OLD COURT BY WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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VOL. I.

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OLD COURT.

A NOVEL.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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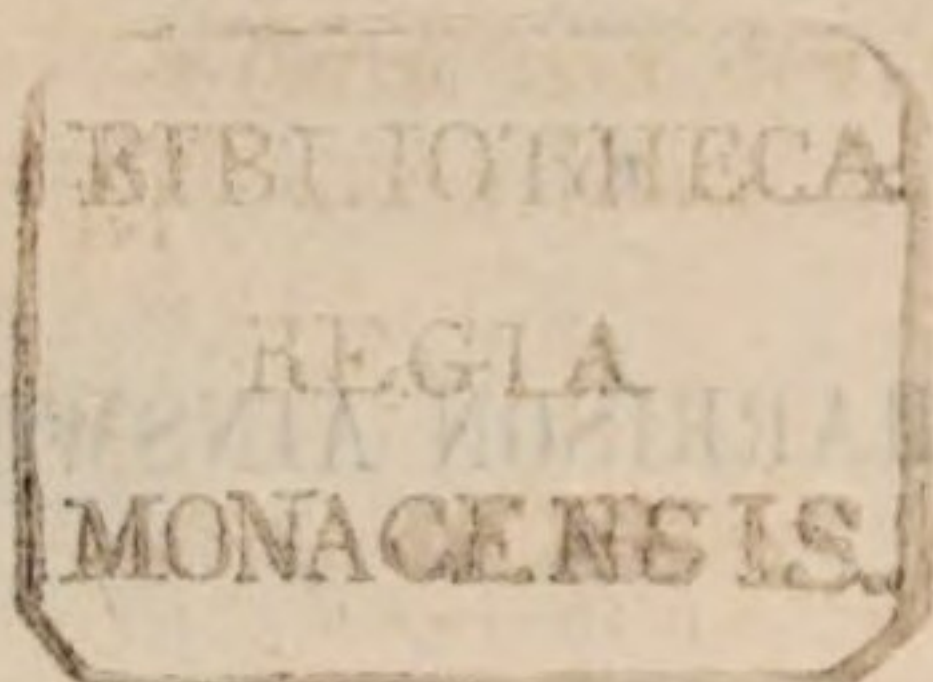
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OLD COURT.

A. 1702



1702

IN THE COURT

VOL. II

1712

DEPARTMENT OF THE

1712

The Court of the

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OLD COURT.

PROLOGUE.

THE BROTHERS.

OLD COURT.

PROLOGUE.

THE PROTHIER.

I.

The Younger Brother.

SOME two-and-twenty years ago, a remarkably handsome young man, plainly attired, but of gentlemanlike appearance, and looking like an officer in the army, rode into the yard of the Bell, at Aylesford, in the pleasant county of Kent, and consigning his horse, who seemed to have done a good day's work, to the ostler, entered the inn. As he passed through a side-door into the house he encountered the landlord, a stout, red-faced man, who, bowing obsequiously, ushered him into a small parlour.

"Any orders, captain?" inquired the host.

"Yes, let me have some dinner," replied the guest, complacently surveying his handsome features in the little mirror over the mantelpiece, and twisting the points of his moustaches.

"What would you like, captain?" said the host.

"Give me what you please," said the guest. "It's now just six o'clock. Let dinner be ready at seven precisely. I've ridden from Hounslow barracks since breakfast, and am infernally hungry, as you may suppose."

"No wonder you're hungry, captain, if you've ridden from Hounslow," said the landlord, smiling. "Well, you shall have a roast fowl and broiled ham, and if that don't satisfy your appetite, there's a cold sirloin of beef to make out with."

"Put the sirloin on the table with the fowl, landlord."

"It shall be done," replied the host. "Perhaps you want a bed. Shall the chambermaid show you a room?"

"No, I shan't sleep here. I'm going farther."

"I should think your horse can't go much farther, captain."

"I don't intend to try him. He will take his rest in your stable to-night. By-the-by, I hope you have got some good claret, landlord."

"First-rate, captain — first-rate. I'll back my claret against any you'll get at Maidstone or Rochester. It's Lafitte, captain."

"Lafitte, is it?" remarked the guest, in an incredulous tone. "Of what vintage, pray?"

"There you puzzle me," replied the host, rather taken aback. "All I know is it's the real thing, as I'm sure you'll admit, captain, when you taste a glass of it."

"I suppose you can tell the price?"

"Better wait till you get the bill, captain," remarked the host, knowingly. "You won't find the charge out of the way."

"Well, if the wine's really good, I shan't complain. But mind, I'm accounted the best judge of claret at our mess, and can't be imposed upon."

"I'm not afraid, captain. My wine will stand the trial. If you're not content, you shan't pay me."

"That's a fair offer, and proves you to be an honest man, landlord. Moreover, it shows you have faith in your wine. I'll stroll to the church while dinner is getting ready. Stay, has anybody inquired after me — Captain Chetwynd?"

"Why, bless my heart and body!" exclaimed the landlord, staring at him. "It can't be Clarence Chetwynd, of Old Court, whom I used to know as a boy?"

"The very same," replied the other, laughing, and slapping him on the shoulder as he spoke. "My name is Clarence Chetwynd just as certainly as yours is Sam Plessets."

"And Sam Plessets is my name, as everybody knows," said the host. "Only to think that I shouldn't recognise you."

"Not so strange, Sam," rejoined Captain Chetwynd. "You haven't seen me since I was a boy. But I knew you, Sam, the moment I set eyes upon you. You're not much changed — only fatter. Shake hands, old fellow! — shake hands!"

"Dear! dear! I'm heartily glad to see you, Clarence — beg pardon, Captain Chetwynd. And now

I look closer at you, I can make out something of the old face that used to smile upon me so good-humouredly ten years ago, when you were a lad of fourteen or fifteen. Ah! you were a handsome lad, Clarence — beg pardon again — Captain Chetwynd, I ought to have said."

"Call me what you please, Sam. To you I shall always be Clarence Chetwynd."

"Well, as I was saying, you were a handsome lad, captain — and a mischievous lad — everlastingly getting into scrapes — ha! ha!"

"I've not lost the old habit yet, Sam. I'm everlastingly getting into scrapes still. I'm in a confoundedly awkward one at the present moment."

"Sorry to hear it, sir," remarked Plessets, in a sympathetic tone — "very sorry. I've helped you out of a great many scrapes years ago. Can I help you now?"

"Much obliged to you, Sam, but I fear not. This is a serious matter."

"Still I may be of some use. Try me, sir."

"You're a good fellow, Sam, and if I could trust any one, I would trust you. But —"

"Excuse me for a minute, captain," interrupted Plessets. "I'll just order your dinner, and come back directly."

The landlord was not long absent, and when he returned, he found the captain reclining in an arm-chair in a very nonchalant attitude, with his

hat pulled over his brows. Plessets had taken the precaution of closing the door as he came in, so as to exclude all listeners, and stepping towards the glossy table near which his guest was seated, he took a chair beside him.

"What sort of scrape is it, captain?" he asked.

"A devilish bad one, I tell you, Sam," rejoined the other, tapping his right boot, which he had swung over the arm of the chair — "a devilish bad one, and likely — nay, certain — to lead to unpleasant consequences — very unpleasant consequences, Sam."

"What have you been about, sir? Gambling? Lost money on the turf, or what?"

"I've lost lots of money, Sam. But it's not that which bothers me now."

"I see what it is!" exclaimed Plessets, as if suddenly struck by an idea. "You're just the gentleman to do it. You've been and run off with another gentleman's wife."

"No, you're out there, Sam," replied Captain Chetwynd, laughing. "But you're right so far that I've got into this infernal scrape about a woman. I've been fool enough to fall in love."

"I don't see any great folly in that, sir, provided —"

"But you will see the folly of it, when I tell you that, by falling in love, I've deeply offended my brother, Sir Hugh. We shall never be friends

again; but that I shouldn't care so much about, for he's so cursed proud there's no tolerating him, only he has stopped my allowance. It's no secret that I am dependent upon my brother, Sam."

"I've heard so, certainly, captain," replied Plessets. "But can't the quarrel be made up? Can't you be reconciled to Sir Hugh by giving up the lady?"

"Impossible, Sam. I haven't made you clearly understand how I have incurred my brother's displeasure. He's my rival, Sam. He's in love with the lady himself, and jealousy makes him so awfully savage. He'd kill me if he could, but as he daren't do that for fear of the consequences, he is content to make me a beggar — hoping, I suppose, that I shall become desperate, and blow out my brains. But I'll balk him."

"Come, come, captain. You do Sir Hugh an injustice," said Plessets. "He's not so bad as that. He may be angry with you just now; but he'll cool down in time."

"I don't care whether he does or not," cried Captain Chetwynd, springing suddenly up. "I hate my brother, Sam. He would rob me of the woman I adore, if he could — but he can't. But he *can* rob me of my money, and that he intends to do. I hate him, I tell you, Sam — worse than the devil."

"I'm sorry to hear you say so, sir — you ought

not to harbour such unchristian-like feelings. You talk of Sir Hugh robbing you, but mightn't he retort, and say you have robbed *him* of his sweet-heart. Maybe, he thinks so. Maybe, he's right in thinking so. But you're his brother, after all, and he must forgive you. Consider how you're circumstanced —"

"My circumstances require no consideration, Sam," interrupted the captain. "I'm a younger son, entirely dependent upon a rich elder brother. I haven't a sixpence except what comes from him. True, I am his heir — heir to Old Court — heir to the baronetcy. But what of that? Sir Hugh — devil seize him! — has it in his power to cut off all my expectations. He may marry and have sons. He's only two years older than I am. What chance have I of succeeding to the property or the title? I wish somebody would shoot him through the head. I've half a mind to do it myself."

He uttered the words so fiercely, that Plessets absolutely recoiled.

"Don't talk in that way, captain, I beg you," he said. "However, I know you don't mean it, and I can make all allowances for your excitement."

"Well, perhaps, I wouldn't shoot him, Sam," remarked Captain Chetwynd; "but I shouldn't be sorry to hear of his death. You look shocked. But if you had an elder brother possessed of a baronetcy, of a large estate, of an old family mansion, of a large park full of fine old timber, with rents coming

in regularly from his tenants, and a heavy balance at his banker's; and if you yourself were just as proud as he, but had neither title, mansion, park, nor rents, and an overdrawn account at your banker's, you'd hate your elder brother, Sam."

"Maybe I might, though I hope not. At all events, I shouldn't wish to deprive him of his title and possessions by unfair means. Neither would you, captain, I'm persuaded."

Captain Chetwynd took no notice of the remark, but he looked as if he should like to have the property, come how it might.

"However, all this has nothing to do with the point in question," pursued Plessets. "You say that you and Sir Hugh have come to a complete rupture about a lady. Is there no chance of settling the quarrel?"

"None whatever, Sam," rejoined Captain Chetwynd, sternly. "Words have passed between me and Sir Hugh that can never be forgotten or forgiven on either side. I have told you thus much, but I will tell you something more. I have spoken of the object of my devotion and of my brother's devotion as a *lady*, but to be candid with you, she is not a lady by birth. However, though she cannot boast high descent, she has as good manners as any lady in the land, and you may be quite sure she must have more than ordinary personal attractions, since she has contrived to inflame the breast of Sir

Hugh Chetwynd. Cold and fastidious as he is, he couldn't resist my Amice. I know that he made the strongest efforts to conquer his passion — that he went abroad for the purpose, hoping by change of scene to effect a cure. In vain. The image of Amice haunted him wherever he went. He could not banish it, and he speedily returned more violently in love than ever. Now imagine what this proud man must have felt. Imagine how completely he must have been enthralled. Imagine what it must have cost him to stoop from his high place, and offer his hand to a simple farmer's daughter. For her sake he was willing to brave all the ridicule which such a match was sure to bring upon him. He offered his hand. She refused him."

"Why on earth did she refuse him?" exclaimed Plessets — "a baronet, young, handsome, wealthy. Excuse my saying so, but she must be a fool to refuse such an offer."

"She refused it because she loved another," rejoined Captain Chetwynd, with a self-satisfied smile.

"May I ask one question, sir," said Plessets. "Was Sir Hugh made aware of the reason why he was refused?"

"Of course. It could not be concealed from him. When he learnt who was his rival — his successful rival — his rage nearly drove him mad. He stormed furiously, taxed me with treachery and ingratitude, and vowed he would make me bitterly

repent my base and dishonourable conduct. It would be no use to detail our meeting to you, Sam. The upshot was, that we are no longer brothers."

"A most unfortunate business altogether," exclaimed Plessets, shaking his head dolefully. "Any advice I might give would, I fear, be useless; but, if you would condescend to listen to me, I would counsel you to make matters up with your brother. You have clearly injured him."

"Injured him!" exclaimed Captain Chetwynd, sharply. "I don't see in what way. I am not to blame because Amice prefers me to him. I was not called upon to surrender her to him because he chose to offer her his hand. You take a strangely perverted view of things, Sam."

"I'm looking at your interest, sir. Circumstanced as you are, in my humble opinion you ought to have resigned the lady to your brother."

"Even if I were capable of doing so, which I am not," said Captain Chetwynd, haughtily, "Amice would not have accepted him. She has given her heart to me, and could not transfer it to another."

"Perhaps I don't understand such matters, sir; but it seems to me that there are very few women who would hesitate between a wealthy baronet and —"

"And a beggarly younger son, you would say, Sam. You are right in the main, no doubt. But Amice happens to be an exception to the rule. She

is a true-hearted woman, and not to be dazzled by rank or wealth. She quite comprehended that Sir Hugh's offer was far superior to mine — but, nevertheless, she refused it."

"I'm sorry she did, both on her own account and yours, captain," said Plessets, stoutly. "Don't be displeased by my freedom, but I must speak out. You seem to have set your mind upon marrying this girl, but I sincerely hope the marriage will never take place, for I am satisfied no good will come of it."

"Sam!" exclaimed Captain Chetwynd, angrily.

"Don't let your love blind you to the consequences of the rash step you are about to take, sir," pursued Plessets. "If you marry the girl, you'll be miserable. You think you can endure poverty for her sake — but I know better. By-and-by you will begin to feel what you have lost, and will reproach her. Reproaches will lead to quarrels, and — I don't like to complete the picture. But I have it before me, sir — I have it before me."

Captain Chetwynd was evidently touched by these remarks, though reluctant to admit their truth. Perceiving he had gained a slight advantage, Plessets determined to follow it up.

"Now were I in your place, sir," he said, "I would write to Sir Hugh, and tell him that I deeply regretted what had occurred; that I would not interfere with his happiness, but would immediately

withdraw my pretensions to the lady — and so forth.”

“You presume rather too far on our old acquaintance, Sam, when you venture to counsel such mean conduct,” said Captain Chetwynd, scornfully. “I am the last man to act so contemptibly.”

“I tell you what it is, sir,” cried Plessets, unable to restrain himself, and becoming warm in his turn, “you’re infatuated about this farmer’s daughter — infatuated, I say. She may be all you represent her, and more — but you will fail to convince me that she is worth the sacrifice you are making for her. Act like a man of sense. The girl will be happier with your brother than with you.”

“You think so?” said the captain.

“I’m sure of it,” rejoined Plessets, confidently. “And what’s more, you will be better without her. Let him take her, then. But make terms for the surrender — good terms. I’ll show you how to do it. Act like a man of sense, I tell you.”

“I should act like a scoundrel if I acted as you would have me, Sam.”

“Well, I’ve done my duty. You’ll rue your folly when too late. But I’ll say no more,” he added, with a groan. “I talk to deaf ears.”

“Harkee, Sam. While you’re about it, why can’t you show me how to get rid of Sir Hugh?”

“Show you what?” cried Plessets, startled.

“Show me how to get rid of Sir Hugh,” continued

Captain Chetwynd, with a very serious look, "before he can deprive me of Old Court and the title by marrying and setting up an heir to the property. Since you are such a clever fellow, show me how to manage this — secretly, so that no suspicion can possibly attach to me."

"What a horrible idea!" exclaimed Plessets, staring aghast. "You've given me a chill down the back. What do you take me for, sir?"

"I take you for a man of sense," replied Captain Chetwynd, gravely — "for a man not much troubled with scruples. I ask you again, how am I to get rid of my brother?"

"This is going too far. If it is a joke, it's a very bad one. I don't like it. Do you suppose I would show you how to m—m—mur—der your brother?"

"Certainly," replied Captain Chetwynd, with the utmost gravity. "Why not?"

"Why not?" exclaimed Plessets, wiping his brow, which had suddenly become damp. "You've thrown me into a cold perspiration; and no wonder. How dare you make such an atrocious proposal to me? I feel myself insulted," he added, trying to get into a passion.

"I'm glad to find you sensitive on some points Sam," cried Captain Chetwynd, bursting into a loud laugh. "My proposition is not a whit more injurious than yours, and I thought that a man who would

advise such a base act as you have just done wouldn't stop at assassination. Ha! ha!"

"Joke or no joke, it's plain to me, captain, that you would be very much obliged to anybody who would put your brother out of the way."

"Why, so I should. I won't deny it," said Captain Chetwynd, still laughing. "So do it, Sam."

"No more of this, if you please, sir. Where is Sir Hugh, just now?"

"At Old Court, I suppose. But I know nothing about him. I'm forbidden the house. Yet something is constantly telling me I shall find myself there again one of these days. Ay, and as lord of the mansion."

"I hope that 'something' may be right, sir. And now," said Plessets, with some diffidence, "I hope I shan't offend you by the offer I'm going to make. Will a hundred pounds be of any use to you? If so, say the word. I can lend it without inconvenience."

"Upon my soul you're a deuced good fellow, Sam, and I'm very much obliged to you. I accept your offer. But I don't know when I can repay you."

"Never mind that. I don't want to be repaid just now. Any time will do for me. Suit your own convenience. I've got the money about me now," said Plessets, producing a fat and greasy-

looking pocket-book, and extracting a roll of bank-notes from it. "I was going to put these in the County Bank at Maidstone, but they'll be much better in your hands."

"Thank ye, Sam — thank ye," cried Captain Chetwynd, as he took the roll, and, without unfolding it, put it into his own smart red morocco pocket-book. "You're a deuced good fellow, Sam. The money will be of immense service to me. A hundred pounds, isn't it?"

"A hundred pounds, sir. Better count the notes, to make sure."

"Not in the least necessary, Sam. I'll take your word for it," replied Captain Chetwynd, securing the notes in his breast-pocket. "You've made me feel quite easy, for, to speak truth, I really do want the money. And now, since we've settled affairs so satisfactorily, I'll stroll to the churchyard and look at the view before it gets dark," he added, taking a cigar from his case, and lighting it.

"Dinner shall be ready against your return, sir," said Plessets, accompanying his guest to the outer door.

The captain nodded, and puffing away at his cigar, sauntered up the street in the direction of the church.

II.

The Elder Brother.

THE fine old Norman church, towards which Captain Chetwynd was slowly wending his way, smoking his cigar as he sauntered along, and ever and anon halting beneath one of the elms which give so agreeable a character to Aylesford, occupies a commanding position at the end of the single street forming that picturesque little town. Having ascended the eminence, he entered the churchyard, and looked round. He was not exactly in the serene frame of mind which would have best enabled him to enjoy a lovely prospect, and he was by no means an enthusiastic admirer of scenery in a general way, but he nevertheless contemplated, with a certain sort of pleasure, the charming landscape now offered to his gaze. The soft beauty of the scene produced a tranquillising effect on his feelings, and awakened a train of thought to which he had been latterly a stranger. He watched the course of the gentle Medway, as it flowed placidly down from Maidstone through luxuriant hop-gardens, past woody banks and fertile meadows, until it swept through the grey arches of the ancient bridge of Aylesford.

A peculiar character was also added to the picture by the sunset, which gave a glowing hue to the smooth surface of the Medway. The evening was perfectly calm — not a breath was stirring — but it was a stillness which seemed the prelude of a storm, for there were appearances in the sky that boded a change. Seated on a tombstone, with his arms folded upon his breast, Captain Chetwynd gazed long at the scene around him, and dwelt pensively and almost fondly upon its beauties; and as the landscape darkened, as the glow upon the river faded away, as the woods of the chalk-hills on the opposite side of the river grew dark and sombre, as the tall festooned hop-poles stood out against a patch of sky where some brightness yet lingered, melancholy thoughts took possession of him, and in spite of all his efforts to shake it off, his mental gloom deepened as the darkness drew on. Long ago, the rooks had returned from the distant plains below Rochester to the trees of the Friary, which skirted the opposite bank of the river, and ere this their cawing had ceased, and now the only sound that greeted his ears was the hooting of a spectral owl as it wheeled around him. A foreboding of ill seized him, and it almost seemed as if he were about to bid adieu to the world. At last, shaking off these gloomy thoughts, he arose from the tombstone, and turned to quit the churchyard.

Just then he became aware of a tall dark figure

standing near the church porch, apparently watching him. At once recognising his brother, Sir Hugh, Captain Chetwynd stopped, half inclined to turn back, and find some other means of egress from the churchyard than that offered by the gate.

"What can he be doing here?" thought the captain. "I would rather not have met him, but I won't turn out of my way."

With this he marched on, intending to pass his brother without addressing him, but Sir Hugh stretched out his arm, and in an authoritative tone commanded him to stay.

"What do you want with me, sir?" demanded Captain Chetwynd, halting.

"I have a proposition to make to you — a final proposition," rejoined Sir Hugh.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the captain, with a bitter laugh. "I thought all was at an end between us. When last we parted, you said you never would exchange another word with me — that, regardless of all ties of relationship and affection, you had cast me off for ever, and bade me never again enter your house, or intrude upon your presence. I never *will* enter your house, sir — my father's house, while you occupy it — I never will come near you, if I can help it — but why, after using such language to me — why do you dog me thus? How did you know I was here?"

"I have followed you to Aylesford," replied Sir

Hugh, "and discovered that you had put up at the Bell, and strolled out to the churchyard. Learning this, I came hither."

"You have given yourself a vast deal of unnecessary trouble, sir," said Captain Chetwynd, very haughtily. "After what has passed, I do not desire to hold any intercourse with you whatever. I do not see by what right you should follow me to Aylesford — still less, why you should force yourself upon me thus. It is better we should meet no more. Permit me to pass." I wish you good evening, sir."

"Stay," said Sir Hugh, in the same authoritative tone as before. "We must have a few more words together. You must — you *shall* listen to me."

"*Shall!* Sir Hugh," exclaimed the captain. "Understand, if you please, that I am not to be bullied. If you have anything particular to say to me, be brief. I have no time to bestow upon you."

"You may as well moderate your tone, Clarence, till you have heard what I have to say," rejoined Sir Hugh. "You may be sure I should not have sought you out without an important object. It costs me a great effort to make the avowal, but I own that I have behaved harshly to you."

"I am glad you feel some compunction for your unnatural conduct," said Captain Chetwynd; "and the admission that you have acted badly is more

than I expected from you. But it does not make much difference in my feelings towards you."

"This quarrel must not be prolonged, Clarence," said Sir Hugh. "You must make some allowances for me. You know how hot-tempered I am, and how greatly you provoked me. I am anxious to make some reparation for my conduct towards you."

"This sounds well," said Captain Chetwynd. "I am not of an unforgiving nature. You have it in your power to make amends. Be liberal, and you shan't complain of want of gratitude on my part."

"I always loved you, Clarence," said Sir Hugh, in a voice of deep emotion — "loved you more as a son than a brother. You were our dear mother's favourite."

"You have an odd way of showing your regard for me," cried Captain Chetwynd, sceptically. "I wish you could display it in a more intelligible manner."

"I have done my best for you, Clarence. I have paid your debts over and over again. At last I would do no more, because I felt it necessary to check your extravagance."

"Very well, then, you can't expect gratitude from me."

"But I haven't said that I won't help you now. I am coming to that. Will you exchange, and go to India?"

"That depends. I must sell out if you don't help me."

"How much do you require? Tell me in a word, without disguise."

"I can't tell you without a little consideration. Probably a few thousands."

"A few thousands!" exclaimed Sir Hugh. "Is it so bad as that?"

"You told me to have no disguise with you, and I have complied. Speaking roundly, I should say five thousand would cover all."

"I will act towards you as your father would have acted," said Sir Hugh, speaking with forced calmness. "I will give you the five thousand pounds, and you can either exchange into some regiment going out to India, or sell out and leave the army. If you consult your own interests, you will go to India."

"I see you still want to get rid of me," remarked the captain. "But make good your words, and I won't trouble you more. I must say it's a deuced handsome offer, and I accept it with gratitude."

"But there is a condition that must be attached to the gift," said Sir Hugh.

"Ha! a condition!" exclaimed Captain Chetwynd, suspiciously. "If the condition happens to relate to a certain person, the whole arrangement falls to the ground. If I go out to India, I shall take a wife with me."

"But not Amice?" cried Sir Hugh.

"Yes, Amice," replied his brother.

For more than a minute not another word was spoken. During the foregoing discourse thunder had been muttering in the distance, and an occasional flash of lightning was seen. But neither of them seemed to heed the storm. Within Sir Hugh's breast a far fiercer storm was raging, but he controlled it. It was now, however, about to be discharged with violence, the greater for being restrained, on his brother's head, when he noticed two persons moving about among the gravestones at a little distance.

"We are interrupted," cried Sir Hugh. "I don't want to be seen here. This matter must be settled to-night."

"Why not settle it now?" demanded his brother. "It requires no reflection on my part."

"No, it can't be settled without some further discussion," replied Sir Hugh, hastily. "Meet me in three hours' time at the cromlech on the hillside behind the town. You know where I mean?"

"Kit's Coity House — yes. But why there? Why not come to the Bell?"

"I don't wish to be seen, I tell you," rejoined Sir Hugh, fiercely. "If you want the five thousand pounds, come."

"Well, I'll come, though it seems strange to go to such a solitary place as Kit's Coity House on a night like this."

"The storm will be over in three hours' time," said Sir Hugh. "But whether it is or not, I shall expect you."

And hurrying away, he disappeared round an angle of the old church.

Scarcely was Sir Hugh gone, than the two persons, who had been lurking for some minutes, unperceived, among the tombstones, came forward, and one of them called out:

"Good evening, captain!"

"Who are you?" demanded Captain Chetwynd.

"Don't you know me, captain? It's your old groom — Neal Evesham — now stableman at the Bell," rejoined the other.

So far as he could be discerned, the speaker was a young man, of middle height, with large sandy-coloured whiskers, and was still habited like a groom, though his garments were exceedingly shabby.

"Yes, I know you now, Neal. But I was not aware you were in Aylesford. Who have you got with you?"

"Only Jos Tarrant, the ostler of the Bell."

"Why the devil did you bring him here?" cried Captain Chetwynd, angrily. "Why are you prying after me in this way? If you want to speak to me, why couldn't you wait at the Bell till I came back?"

"I might have waited, to be sure," rejoined Neal; "but hearing you had gone out to the churchyard, I thought I'd just come after you, and Jos

Tarrant came with me. I meant no offence, captain. Can I just speak a word to you?"

"Not now. By-and-by," rejoined Captain Chetwynd. "I'll send for you when I want you."

So saying, and without taking any notice of the ostler, who touched his cap as he went by, Captain Chetwynd quitted the churchyard, and walked quickly back to the Bell.

"The captain's out of humour, I'm thinking," remarked Jos, as Chetwynd strode away.

"He suspects we have overheard what passed between him and Sir Hugh," said Neal Evesham. "And so we have. We heard that they're to meet again to-night at Kit's Coity House. We'll be there, Jos. We shall learn some secrets that'll be worth pounds to us."

"I was thinkin' of it," rejoined the ostler. "Three hours hence, ain't it? That'll be ten o'clock. We'll be there an hour afore."

"Kit's Coity House is a good hiding-place," said Evesham. "Save us! how awfully the thunder rolls! What a night it's likely to be."

III.

Neal Evesham.

DINNER had been waiting for some time for Captain Chetwynd, but though the landlord expressed surprise that his guest should have remained out so long, the latter volunteered no explanation. After he had finished his repast, and drunk a glass or two of the excellent claret set before him by Plessets, he summoned Neal Evesham, and being now in a genial frame of mind, regarded that shabby-looking personage with more complacency than he had done in the churchyard.

"You were angry with me just now, captain," said Neal; "but I really didn't mean to interrupt you."

"Interrupt me! What do you mean, rascal?" said Chetwynd, looking at him.

"Oh! I know who you were talking to. But I heard nothing. The moment I saw Sir Hugh was with you, I stopped. I hope you've settled matters with your brother."

"Why, yes, we've come to a better understanding, Neal. It's not unlikely that I shall leave the country — go to India. Are you inclined to go with me?"

"I shouldn't mind it, sir. I've heard that India's a very fine country; and so rich, that every one makes a fortune out there."

"You're sure to make a fortune there, Neal."

"I shall never make one here, sir. I'm very hard up, as you can perceive without my telling you. Could you let me have the five pounds you owes me, sir?"

"I owe you nothing, Neal," said the captain.

"Oh yes you do, sir, if you'll just take the trouble to recollect — about that colt, sir."

"I remember nothing about the colt, but since you tell me you're hard up, and your looks and habiliments bear out the assertion, you shall have the money. Here's a fiver for you."

As he spoke, he took out his pocket-book, and unfolding the roll of bank-notes, gave a five-pound note to Evesham, who thanked him, and kept his greedy eyes fixed upon the pocket-book so long as it remained in sight.

"We'll talk about India to-morrow, Neal," pursued Chetwynd, "for then I shall know my plans better. I've something to do to-night. Now I think of it, get me a good thick stick. There are many hop-pickers about, and they're not the honestest folk in the world."

"Would you like a pistol, sir? Jos Tarrant has got one. Shall I borrow it? It's a nice pocket-pistol. You'll find it no encumbrance."

"Go fetch it, and let it be loaded," said Chetwynd.

Neal departed on his errand, and looking out for Jos Tarrant, found him in the harness-room, adjoining the stables.

"There'll be bloody work to-night, old chap," he said. "The captain wants your pistol. It's my belief he intends to shoot his brother."

"Nonsense! It's not possible!" exclaimed the ostler.

"He wants your pistol, I tell you — wants it loaded with ball," said Evesham.

"Well, he can have it if he wants it," rejoined Jos, opening a drawer, and taking out a pistol. "Here 'tis," he added, showing it to Evesham. "I always do keep it loaded wi' a brace of bullets; but I'd take 'em out, if I thought he meant mischief."

"No necessity to do that, Jos. He only wants to carry the pistol in self-defence. He's afraid of the hop-pickers. Give it me."

"Stop while I put on a fresh copper cap," said Jos, searching about in the drawer for the article in question. Having found it at last, and put it on, he handed the pistol to Evesham, saying as he did so, "That's a handy little weep'n, ben't it, Neal?"

"Remarkably handy," observed Evesham, admiring it. "It would do a man's business in a crack."

"Ay, if he got them two bullets in his brain, he'd not give much trouble arterwards," remarked Jos, with a coarse laugh.

"What's your opinion, old chap?" asked Neal. "Does it require much nerve to shoot a man?"

"Not in self-defence," returned the ostler.

Neal was still examining the pistol by a stable-lantern which imperfectly lighted the room, when the door was suddenly opened by Plessets. On seeing him, Evesham slipped the pistol into his pocket, though not so quickly but that the landlord perceived what he was about.

"What are you hiding, Neal?" asked Plessets.

"Hiding, sir — nothing," replied Evesham, in some confusion.

"It looked like a pistol," remarked Plessets.

"A pistol, sir! Oh no, sir. Was it, Jos?"

"I see you wi' summat in your hand, but I didn't notice what 'twas," said the ostler.

"These two fellows are about something wrong," thought Plessets. However, he made no further remark, but only said to Evesham: "The captain wants you. You'll find him in the yard."

Glad to get away, Neal hurried out, and, guided by the light of a cigar, speedily discovered Captain Chetwynd standing near the side-door of the inn.

"Well, have you got the pistol, Neal?" asked the captain.

"Yes; here it is," replied the other.

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes, sir, with a couple of bullets."

"That's right," replied Chetwynd, with a short dry laugh; adding, as he secured the pistol in his breast-pocket, "I don't sleep here to-night, Neal, but shall be back in the morning. Come to me after breakfast, and you shall know my plans."

"I shall know your plans before that, I calculate," muttered Neal Evesham, looking after his sometime master, as the latter turned out into the street. "I wonder where he's off to now?" thought Neal, peering after him.

But he could only just make out a dark figure walking quickly along the street in the opposite direction of the church.

IV.

Amice.

WE must now repair to a small cottage, very charmingly situated on the right bank of the Medway, and about equi-distant from Aylesford and Maidstone. Shaded by a noble elm, and boasting a very pretty and extremely well-kept garden, this little rustic dwelling commanded lovely views of the course of the Medway, and of the enchanting vale through which the river flows. It also commanded a fine view of Maidstone, with its archiepiscopal palace, its hospital, and collegiate church — three noble structures which give such picturesque character to that ancient town.

The cottage, as we have said, was very pretty, with a thatched roof, lattice windows, and a rustic porch. Its walls were covered with roses and woodbine, and the trim little garden in front was likewise planted with roses. But we have nothing to do with the exterior of the dwelling, and must go inside. On the night on which our story commences, in a little room, simply but tastefully furnished, might have been seen a young creature of such rare beauty, of such symmetry of person, such grace of

manner, and such sweetness of expression, that she certainly seemed out of place in that unpretending little apartment. Not but that the room was very pretty, its walls exhibiting some charming water-colour drawings, and its little tables a variety of objects which only feminine taste can group together, but its fair occupant was a pearl of such price that she seemed to merit a richer casket. As we steal upon her privacy we find her alone, seated at a piano, and can listen to one of the sweetest voices that ever gave utterance to song. For a few minutes we are enthralled by the melody, but as the song ceases and she turns, we are ravished by the full view of an enchanting oval face, chiselled as if by a sculptor, lighted up by the softest blue eyes imaginable, with blonde tresses so arranged as fully to display the snowy brow, delicately-pencilled eyebrows, and rosy lips parted to display two ranges of pearls.

Having finished her song, as we have said, this charming personage glances at the French clock on the mantelpiece, and, finding it not yet eight, heaves a sigh, and murmuring, "How slowly time glides on!" begins to employ the taper fingers, which have already excited our admiration, in some dainty needle-work. Thus seen, she is quite as beautiful as when seated at the piano, and the little air she murmurs sounds like the hymn of a spirit. In this manner she beguiles the time for some minutes, and we are never

tired of watching her at her work, when all at once she starts up. Her cheeks glow, her eyes brighten, for her quick ears have caught the sound of a foot-step outside.

"He is come!" she exclaims, in accents of delight.

There is a knock at the front door, which is presently opened, but a momentary delay occurs in the passage, and she is just going out to ascertain the cause, full of eagerness to behold him she expects, when the door of the little parlour is thrown open, and, in spite of the efforts of an old woman to prevent him, a tall, dark man, with handsome but stern features, and attired in sombre habiliments that set off his sallow countenance forces his way into the room, and shuts the door after him, fastening it to prevent the old woman's entrance.

At first the lady was so much alarmed by this apparition, that she could scarcely repress a scream, but she quickly regained her composure, and, with a look in which surprise and indignation were mingled, said:

"What means this unwarrantable intrusion, Sir Hugh?"

"I am come to have a last word with you, Amice," he replied.

"I cannot allow it. I cannot listen to anything you have to say," she rejoined. "I must beg you to leave the house at once. I must insist upon your

doing so. I am expecting Clarence this evening. Indeed, I thought you were he."

"I know you are expecting him," he said. "I have seen him at Aylesford, and have an appointment with him at a later hour to-night. It is in reference to that meeting that I have now come to you."

"I thought all intercourse was at an end between you and your brother, Sir Hugh," said Amice. "May I hope that a reconciliation has taken place between you? Oh, if it should be so!" she exclaimed, earnestly, while tears started to her eyes, "I shall be so rejoiced."

"Some steps have been made towards a reconciliation, and it shall not be my fault if it is not fully brought about."

"Oh, you are very kind — very good to say so, Sir Hugh. You know Clarence as well as I do — better. He is impetuous, but generous. Only treat him kindly, and he will do whatever you require — I am sure of it."

"I feel that I have treated him harshly, and have told him so," said Sir Hugh.

"That was enough. He could not expect more. He at once embraced you as a brother?"

"No, Amice, he met all my advances with coldness — with rudeness almost. But I bore with him. You will see him before I meet him again to-night, and I would have you assure him, as you may do

with safety, that I am influenced by the best feelings towards him. I have made him a most advantageous offer, which will relieve him from all his difficulties. I proposed that he should exchange his regiment for some other in India."

"Did he object?"

"Not exactly, but he seemed indifferent. I then proposed that he should retire from the army altogether, and live abroad."

"Well, I am sure he would like that!" she cried, eagerly.

"I offered him the means of living abroad comfortably," said Sir Hugh. "But rather than he should not be satisfied, I will share my fortune with him. Tell him so."

"I will. He must be satisfied. You are too generous, Sir Hugh."

"You may not think so, Amice, when I add that the condition which I annex to my offer is, that he shall abandon all thoughts of you."

"Oh, Sir Hugh!" she exclaimed. "You render acceptance of your noble offer impossible. Did not Clarence tell you so?"

"He did. But you may induce him to alter his determination."

"I, Sir Hugh! How can you hope it? — how can you expect it from me?"

"It is the only way in which Clarence can be saved from utter ruin," said Sir Hugh, coldly.

"But has he not explained to you that ——"
And she suddenly checked herself.

"I need no explanation," said Sir Hugh. "I know he loves you passionately. I know he is resolved to wed you. But I know that if he does so, he will become a beggar."

"Oh, do not say so, dear Sir Hugh!" she cried, piteously. "Do not abandon him."

"Think not to move me, Amice," said Sir Hugh. "Unless he complies with my condition, I will do nothing for him — nothing whatever. I swear it. He must give up all thoughts of *you*, and you — you, Amice must forget *him*."

"Forget him! Sir Hugh, you ask me to perform an impossibility."

"However great the pang, Amice," pursued Sir Hugh, passionately, "you must tear him from your heart. He is unworthy of your love, and it is well for you that you are not already united to him."

She shrank back at the words, and averted her face.

"I do not desire to wound your feelings, Amice," pursued Sir Hugh, "but it is necessary to speak out. I could tell you that of Clarence which would instantly change your love for him to aversion and contempt."

"Then do *not* tell it," she cried, with an agonised look. "But whatever you tell, I will not believe it. Oh, Sir Hugh! This is ungenerous — unmanly."

"I must unmask him, in order to save you from the pit, on the brink of which you stand. You will thank me hereafter."

"Never! never! never! I shall never thank you," she exclaimed. "In mercy, spare me further torture."

"I must go on," said Sir Hugh, relentlessly. "I must convince you that Clarence is unworthy of your love — that a union with him will make you wretched."

"You never can convince me of that, Sir Hugh," she cried, proudly. "I now see through your dishonourable design. You try to alienate my affections from Clarence by traducing him. But you will fail. I have more faith in him than I have in you. I know he idolises me, and is prepared to make any sacrifice for me — any sacrifice, Sir Hugh. I will share his fortunes, be they what they may."

"Poor, weak, credulous fool!" exclaimed Sir Hugh. "He will desert you before three months are over. You are utterly inexperienced in the world, Amice, or you would know, without my having to tell you, that a man who has led a profligate life — who is plunged in difficulties from which he can only extricate himself in *one* way — you would feel, I say, that such a man cannot possibly make a good husband. I bid you beware! Do not link your destinies with those of such a person. A far different course, and certain to lead to happiness, awaits you, if you have only the prudence to take it."

"I perceive what you are coming to, Sir Hugh. But it is useless."

"Yet I will speak, Amice," he went on, passionately, "because the happiness or misery of the rest of my life depends on your decision. My nature, as you must have remarked, is wholly different from that of Clarence. Early in life I loved, or fancied I loved, a fair, frivolous creature — but she jilted me for another, and, becoming embittered, I shunned the society of your sex. I thought I should never have loved again — and, perhaps, I never should, if I had not met you, Amice. You were my fate. I felt drawn towards you by an irresistible attraction. I felt that a sweet, guileless creature like yourself, unused to the world, unspoiled, could alone make me happy. Still, there was a desperate struggle in my breast betwixt pride and love; but, in the end, love conquered. All considerations of disparity of rank vanished. I made up my mind to brave the jeers of the world, and determined to offer you my hand. Little did I expect the answer I received. Little did I deem that my offer would be rejected." He paused, for his voice had become broken by emotion, but presently proceeded: "You may conceive what must have been the effect of the blow on a proud spirit like mine. I could not recover from it. I have not yet recovered. I tried to reason with myself. I felt all the pangs of unrequited love, and found them intolerable. I went abroad, in the

hope of finding relief from my suffering, and returned only half cured — returned to be crushed by the knowledge that you had given your heart to my brother.”

“Our affections are not under our own control, Sir Hugh,” she replied, in a tone of deep sympathy. “I could not deceive you by telling you that I loved you when my heart was already given to Clarence.”

There was another pause, during which Sir Hugh was evidently struggling fiercely with his emotions. At last he broke forth:

“Can you not distinguish between a profound, passionate attachment like mine, Amice,” he cried, “and that of a libertine like Clarence? Can you not discern the difference between us? With me you will be elevated to a proud position — you will be adored by a husband whose life will be devoted to you. With Clarence you will be used as a mere toy, to be cast aside when he is tired of you.”

“You do Clarence a cruel injustice, Sir Hugh. But I will not condescend to defend him from such shameful aspersions, of which the motive is only too palpable. I must beg you not to prolong this interview, which is excessively painful to me.”

“Have you no pity for me, Amice? Can you see my anguish unmoved?”

“I pity you, but I cannot help you. Pray

cease! If I listen to you more, I shall do a wrong to Clarence."

"You will be answerable, then, for whatever happens to him," he said, in a stern and menacing tone. "You have it in your power to save him from ruin and disgrace. You have it in your power to avoid all the calamities which a marriage with him will infallibly produce. You have it in your power to make me the happiest of men instead of the most miserable."

"No, Sir Hugh, I have not the power to do as you desire."

"What hinders you?" he cried, fiercely. "But I know what hinders you — the ascendancy which this profligate has obtained over you. But when you find his love turned to aversion, as it will be, you will regret your decision. Farewell! I do not suppose we shall ever meet again. I shall see Clarence anon, and now know what to say to him."

"Do not harm him, Sir Hugh. Your looks terrify me. Promise me not to harm him, or I will not let him meet you."

"I will do him no personal injury. Rest easy on that score. Farewell!"

Without another look at her, he unfastened the door, and, pushing aside the old woman whom he met in the passage, let himself out of the house.

When the old woman entered the parlour, she found her young mistress extended upon a couch in a state of great agitation.

She essayed to soothe her, but Amice declined her well-meant attentions, and the old woman presently retired, lifting up her eyes and shaking her head as she went out of the room.

V.

Presentiments of Ill.

NOTWITHSTANDING all her efforts, Amice could not shake off the uneasiness caused by Sir Hugh's visit. She tried a book — she tried music — she tried work. In vain. She could neither read, sing, nor ply the needle. She could only think over what Sir Hugh had said, and she shuddered as she recalled his dark looks and menaces.

"What a strange, terrible man he is!" she mentally ejaculated. "And he persuades himself that I could love him as well as Clarence."

Just then the door was softly opened, and Clarence himself stood before her. How did he get into the house without being heard, for she was listening for him? No matter! With a cry of delight she sprang towards him, and was instantly clasped to his heart.

"My own darling!" he exclaimed. "How delighted I am to see you again! But what's the matter? You have not been weeping?"

"I have had a disagreeable visitor, Clarence. Sir Hugh has been here."

"Been here, has he!" cried the captain, knitting his brows. "I might have guessed as much. Well,

I suppose he informed you of the offer he has made me. He wants me to part with my precious pet for five thousand pounds. But I wouldn't sell her for double the sum, though I am desperately in want of money just now."

"You *can't* sell me, or I should feel no security, Clarence," she rejoined, with a faint attempt at a smile. "Sir Hugh seemed to intimate that you would do anything for money. You don't know what a bad character he gave you."

"I can easily guess," he replied, with some uneasiness. "He would stick at nothing to injure me in your esteem. But I feel sure you didn't believe him."

"It was indeed evident that he desired to prejudice me against you. The only excuse for his conduct is that he does not know we are married."

"I hope you didn't give him the slightest idea that we are so, my darling?" said Clarence, quickly.

"I felt strongly inclined to tell him the truth, but I refrained," she replied.

"Quite right, my angel — quite right. I don't mean to let him — or any one else — into our secret just at present. It would serve Sir Hugh right to take him in. I must get money out of him in some way."

"But I hope you don't mean to take him in by representing ——"

"If he will give me five thousand to go abroad,

he may find out that I'm married when I'm gone. That's what I mean, my love."

"You mustn't think of it, Clarence. Consider! I should be subjected to the most dreadful annoyance. I can take no part in such a scheme."

"Then I *won't* think of it," he rejoined. "My little pet is always right."

"Your little pet is certainly right now, and, if you will follow her advice, you won't meet your brother to-night. Don't go, Clarence — don't go! No good can come of the meeting."

"Whatever may come of it, I shall go," said Captain Chetwynd. "Sir Hugh has far more reason to be afraid of me than I have of him. He *shall* do something for me, I'm resolved."

"You alarm me as much as he did, Clarence," she cried. "And you have precisely the same look that he had. Don't exasperate your brother, Clarence. He is dangerous to-night."

"Why, so am I dangerous, as he will find, if he rouses my anger," said the captain. "We are both of the same stock."

"And therefore ought not to quarrel," she cried, clasping her arms round his neck, and gazing entreatingly into his face. "You won't quarrel with him, Clarence — you won't, for my sake."

"I won't promise. It depends on how he treats me."

"But you have already had a serious quarrel with him. Don't aggravate it further. Ah! what is this?" she cried, as she leaned against his breast. "A pistol! You don't mean to take that with you, Clarence?"

"We are to meet at a solitary spot — at Kit's Coity House on the downs, in fact. I carry the pistol for protection."

"Not against your brother, Clarence. You cannot suspect him of any foul design."

"I scarce know what I suspect. I choose to go armed."

"Pray leave the pistol with me. The interview with your brother has made me dreadfully nervous, and I can't help fearing the night will not pass without some dire calamity."

"Why, what a silly, timorous creature you are!" cried the captain, trying to force a laugh, but with very indifferent success.

"Call me what you please, Clarence, but yield to my request. Leave the pistol with me."

"But suppose I should be attacked. There are bands of hop-pickers about Maidstone and Aylesford, and amongst them are many loose characters. It's scarcely safe to walk about at night."

"Since this is the case, it is better you should be armed. But it would be better still if you did not go out at all. Oh, stay with me!"

"I must be firm, my darling. I should for ever reproach myself if I yielded, even to your entreaties. I feel this to be my last chance with my brother. If I fail to move him now, all is lost, and I must turn to some other course of life."

"Let it be so, Clarence. And be sure *I* shan't repine."

"I don't know what the deuce we *can* do, Amice," he cried. "I'm not made for a poor man. I've too many wants, and am too self-indulgent. But it's not quite come to that horrible pass yet, and I don't think it will. I shall force Sir Hugh to help me. That's why I *must* see him."

"Tell him all, then, Clarence, and throw yourself upon his generosity. Or, let me go with you. I can say more than you can, and my presence will prevent mischief, of which, I own, I'm afraid."

"Your presence will cause mischief, not prevent it, you little simpleton," rejoined Captain Chetwynd. "Does it never occur to you that you are the bone of contention between my brother and myself? When the disclosure is made to him that we are married, he'll become perfectly infuriated."

"At least, I can help you to bear the brunt of his displeasure, Clarence," she said, summoning up her resolution. "Let him visit his anger upon me. I shan't fear him with you by my side. He must know the truth sooner or later. Let us get it over to-night."

"You're a charmingly courageous little woman!" cried Captain Chetwynd. "But I mustn't expose you to such a scene as this is sure to be. If Sir Hugh, blinded by fury, were to insult you — as he might — I should certainly kill him. You start — but I should. No, no, you mustn't go with me, Amice. There may be a devil of a row between us, or all may go off well. When I return, I hope to have satisfactory tidings for you. At present, all seems dark and gloomy enough, but I am not down-hearted. I couldn't bear to leave you, my darling."

"And I should die if you did leave me, Clarence. You have not been much with me since our secret marriage; but though pained, I have reconciled myself to your absence, knowing it to be unavoidable. But if you were to leave me entirely, I should die."

"Many married people are separated for years, Amice, and yet contrive to live happily enough apart."

"I am not one of them. I should be wretched without you. If you were to quit me thus, you would find me dead on your return."

"Well, depend upon it I will never leave you, if I can help it, Amice; but I am scarcely my own master at this moment. To-night will decide my fate. The idea took possession of me when Sir Hugh proposed Kit's Coity House as our place of

rendezvous, and I can't get rid of it. I should like to see you Lady Chetwynd, and mistress of Old Court, Amice."

"But that can't be while your brother lives — so it's idle to think of it," she rejoined.

"No, of course it can't," he cried, breaking from her, and striding about the room. "I wish to Heaven I had been the elder son! Why should I be doomed to this wretched dependence upon a brother? Why should he enjoy all the worldly advantages, and leave me none? But he *shall* behave properly to me, or ——"

"Clarence, you must not indulge these thoughts," she interrupted, taking his arm gently, "or you will not be in a proper frame of mind to meet your brother."

"He is most confoundedly in my way," pursued Captain Chetwynd, scarcely heeding her.

"But since he cannot be removed, why worry yourself with useless repining?" she said. "Accept your position cheerfully."

"Well, I suppose I must, but it's devilish hard to bear," he rejoined. "I'm more vexed on your account than my own, Amice."

"Don't think of me, Clarence," she cried. "I have no regrets — no desire ungratified. You may be quite sure that to be Lady Chetwynd and mistress of Old Court would be no temptation to me."

"Yes, I am quite sure of that," he said. "But to *me* it would be everything. Oh, to see you there! But it can't be! — it can't be!" he exclaimed, bitterly.

"Therefore, I repeat, don't worry yourself. Sit down, and let us talk on some other subject. I should like to see you more composed before you set out on this disagreeable errand."

"I shall get calm enough as I walk along," he replied. "It is time to set out," he added, as the clock on the chimney-piece struck nine. "I shall be back before midnight; but don't sit up for me. I hope to bring you good news."

"Clarence!" she exclaimed, a cold shiver passing over her frame. "Something warns me that I ought not to let you go."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "We have discussed all this before. I thought you had got rid of your misgivings."

"I thought so too, but they have returned with greater force than ever. I almost fear I shall never behold you again. Don't go, I entreat you," she cried, clinging to him.

"Oh, you will see me again in a few hours, you superstitious darling!" he cried, disengaging himself gently from her, and moving towards the door.

Then, touched by her look of anguish, he went back, and embraced her tenderly.

"Never did I feel a parting thus!" she exclaimed, with an irrepressible outburst of anguish. "Can it be ominous? Kiss me again, Clarence."

"There! will that content you? You have infected me with your superstitious fear. So if anything unforeseen should happen, and we should never meet again, think kindly of me — always kindly, Amice."

"Always! always! I shall never think of you otherwise than with the deepest love," she rejoined. "May Heaven preserve you!"

"Adieu! God bless you!" he exclaimed.

Pressing her cold lips once more, he rushed out of the room — and so quitted the house.

As the outer door closed, and the sound of his footsteps died away, Amice dropped upon her knees, fervently beseeching Heaven to watch over him — to guard him from all injury, and save him from all crime.

VI.

Kit's Coity House.

THE storm had passed, but the night was still sombre, and clouds were trooping over the sky from the south-west. Occasionally, however, the moon, then in her last quarter, struggled forth, and cast a gleam on the cromlech, which, seen by this light, had a weird and fantastic appearance. Rude as it was, that monument of a hero of the Fifth Century had endured while many a prouder sepulchre of much later date had crumbled to dust. For full thirteen centuries those ponderous stones had held together, exposed to wind and rain on the side of the bleak downs, and seemed calculated to last, if undisturbed by man, till Doomsday. Three gigantic upright stones, roofed by a fourth, larger and thicker than its supporters, and weighing many tons, formed the pile. Originally, the cromlech had been shut in on all sides, but it was now open on the east, the huge boulder which once stood there having been removed.

These stones mark the burial-place of an heroic British prince, Catigern, who was slain in 445 in a battle with the Saxons. At any time the cromlech, from its position on the downs overlooking the

valley of the Medway, forms a remarkable object, but on the night in question, now plunged in shade, and looking ghostly and grim; now suddenly revealed as the moonbeams fell upon it, it was more than usually striking and impressive. It spoke so plainly of other times and of another race of men, that none could gaze upon it without a certain sense of awe. At night the spot was solitary, for as the cromlech was supposed to be guarded by the spirit of Catigern, few persons cared to approach it, and those who did repented their rashness.

Towards Kit's Coity House two persons now shaped their course, and as they climbed the downs, and drew near the pile, some of the tales connected with it rushed to their recollection, and filled them with misgiving. It looked so strange and unearthly at that hour, that they almost feared that old Kit, as they irreverently styled the ancient British hero, would punish their intrusion upon his burial-place.

"I wish the meeting had taken place anywhere else than at Kit's Coity House," remarked Jos Tarrant. "I don't like the spot."

"Pshaw!" cried Neal Evesham. "Old Kit won't trouble us."

"I'm not so sure of that," hesitated Jos. "I've heard strange tales of his doings. My mind misgives me. I shall go back."

"You can't go back now," cried Neal. "Why, you're weaker than a child. Come on, I say."

Thus exhorted, and half ashamed of the weakness he had exhibited, Jos marched on with his companion without uttering another word. As the two men stood beside the gigantic stones, they looked like pigmies.

Neal Evesham glanced right and left, but no one was visible. He could just distinguish the little town of Aylesford lying at the foot of the downs — he could make out the old church on the bank, the ancient bridge, and the Medway, which chanced at the moment to be lighted up by the moon. He saw an old house in the midst of the coppices on the right, and, farther, the lurid flames of the chalk-kilns attracted his attention. There were some barges on the river, and others moored to the banks, and voices could be heard where he stood. Having satisfied himself by a general survey that no one was in view, Neal remarked, in a low voice, to his companion,

“Apparently, we’re first at the place of rendezvous.”

“Perhaps one on ’em may be inside,” observed Jos.

“Not at all likely,” rejoined Neal. “But I’ll see.”

And he passed through the yawning aperture into the interior of the cromlech.

The next moment he called out,

“No one here. Come in, old chap.”

"I'd rather stay where I am at present," rejoined Jos. "I'm afeared of old Kit. They say he crushes folk to death beneath the stones."

"But you'll be seen," cried Neal, impatiently. "There's one of 'em coming. I hear the tramp of a horse."

And, as he spoke, a horseman could be discerned coming along the Maidstone road. Presently, this person turned off from the highway, and rode up the hill. As there could now be no doubt that he was one of those expected, Jos overcame his repugnance, and entered Kit's Coity House. Neal, however, kept near the outlet, placing himself so that he could watch the horseman without being observed.

It was soon apparent that the new comer was Sir Hugh. He did not ride straight up to the cromlech, but, after halting for a moment, dismounted, tied his horse to an old stunted thorn, and then strode towards the burial-place of the ancient Briton.

As he drew near, the two spies, who could hear his footsteps quite distinctly, were under great apprehension lest their retreat should be discovered. But it never seemed to occur to Sir Hugh that any one could be inside the cromlech. He did not so much as pause at the entrance, but paced to and fro outside like a sentinel.

At last he became stationary, and Neal, venturing to peep out, perceived his tall dark figure close at hand. Neal had enough to do to keep Jos quiet,

the ostler being seized with a violent inclination to cough and sneeze. Half an hour passed in this way, and both Sir Hugh and the spies began to think that Captain Chetwynd did not mean to keep his appointment.

At last footsteps were heard, and Neal, bringing his mouth close to the ostler's ear, whispered, "Here he is; keep still."

Neal then returned to his post of observation, and curiosity now got so much the better of the ostler's fears, that he crept forward on his hands and knees to see, as well as hear, what was going on.

As Captain Chetwynd came up, he saluted Sir Hugh formally, and said, "I'm afraid I've kept you waiting, sir."

"I was here before the appointed time," rejoined the other. "But a truce to ceremony. Let us come at once to the point."

"I am quite prepared to do so," rejoined the captain. "Say on."

"You know that I have seen Amice, I conclude?" said Sir Hugh.

"Who's Amice?" asked Jos.

"Hold your tongue," rejoined Neal, punching him in the ribs.

"Yes, I'm aware of it," said Captain Chetwynd. "She has not failed to acquaint me with the disreputable character you gave me."

"I told her nothing but the truth, and not even the whole truth," rejoined Sir Hugh.

"But you did not succeed in prejudicing her against me. A woman will never believe ill of the man she loves. You ought to know that. You damaged your own cause by pursuing so injudicious a course."

"Have you reflected?" cried Sir Hugh, impatiently. "Have you made up your mind to accept my offer?"

"You want me to live abroad?" rejoined the other, evasively.

"For a year or two, till your affairs can be arranged," rejoined Sir Hugh; "and till I am perfectly satisfied of your reformation."

"Well, I shall have no objection," said the captain. "But you must make it worth my while to go. Five thousand is not enough. I can't expatriate myself under double that amount."

"It is impossible to give you more down. But I'll pay your debts, and allow you a thousand a year."

"That's tempting — very tempting. You'll pay a year in advance, no doubt?"

"Then you agree?" cried Sir Hugh, eagerly. "It shall be done. But you must start at once. I'll make every requisite arrangement."

"Stop! You're a great deal too quick. We've

not said a word about the main point. What's to become of Amice?"

"Who's Amice?" again inquired Jos.

"Hold your tongue, curse you, or I'll strangle you," rejoined Neal.

"Leave her to me," said Sir Hugh. "It is to separate you from her that I make this offer. Don't prate to me about your love. I know what *your* love is. In six months you will have forgotten her. Go, and rest assured that I will fulfil my engagement with you."

"I told you before that I don't mean to go without Amice," said the captain, doggedly. "I mean to marry her."

"You shall never marry her," rejoined Sir Hugh, in a determined tone. "I will prevent you."

"You prevent me!" exclaimed his brother, contemptuously. "I like that."

"So do I. I like it immensely," chuckled Jos, receiving a severe punch from his companion, which stopped him.

"Yes, I will prevent it," said Sir Hugh, in the same firm tone.

"Be good enough to let me know how?" asked Captain Chetwynd.

"I will effectually prevent it," said Sir Hugh, "by arresting you for forgery. You know that you forged my name, and that I have proofs of the

criminal act. Hitherto, I have spared you, but I will no longer spare you. Rather than you shall marry this girl, I will transport you. Now, will you go?"

"No, I won't," rejoined Captain Chetwynd, boldly. "You seek to intimidate me in vain. You have no proof of the atrocious charge you bring against me."

"By the Lord! it is an atrocious charge," muttered Neal. "I wonder whether it's true?"

"Since you defy me, you shall feel my power, and that before many hours are past," said Sir Hugh.

"I laugh at your threats," said Captain Chetwynd. "Your own pride will not let you bring such a charge against me."

"You are an unmitigated scoundrel, Clarence!" cried Sir Hugh, exasperated beyond endurance.

"Retract that expression — retract all you said about the forgery — or, by Heaven! I will shoot you through the head," cried Captain Chetwynd, plucking the pistol from his breast.

"I expected it would come to this," muttered Neal.

"I am not afraid of you," rejoined Sir Hugh, scornfully; "you dare not add murder to your other crimes."

"Retract, I say," cried the captain, fiercely, "or you shan't quit this spot alive."

And he levelled the pistol at his brother's head.

Sir Hugh seized his arm, and in the fierce struggle that ensued the pistol went off, and its contents were lodged in Captain Chetwynd's breast. He fell to the ground with a groan, but never spoke more.

Horror-stricken at the dreadful deed he had unwittingly committed, Sir Hugh flung down the pistol, knelt beside his brother, raised his head, and gazed into his face, half bereft of reason.

The next moment he sprang to his feet, and called out, in a voice that scarcely sounded human,

"What have I done? I have shed my brother's blood. The curse of Cain will be upon me for ever!"

Thus crying, he ran towards his horse, sprang into the saddle, and galloped furiously off, as if eager to get away from the fatal spot.

VII.

How the two Rogues were caught in a Trap.

THE two unsuspected witnesses of this tragical occurrence were so startled by it that they neither called out nor attempted interference of any kind, and it was only when Sir Hugh hurried off to his horse that they ventured out of the cromlech.

The distracted baronet might have seen them, but he never attempted to look back, but dashed down the hill-side as if the furies were at his heels. Though Neal and his companion had been within a few yards of the brothers during the deadly struggle, they could not tell which of them had fallen, and were of opinion that it was the elder, till they saw him take flight.

"Why, it's the capt'n as is shot, arter all!" exclaimed Jos, gazing at the body. "Is there any life in him?"

"Not a particle. Your bullets have done his business, old chap," rejoined Neal, raising the head, and tearing open the shirt of the dead man. "He's shot through the heart. That's why he couldn't call out. Death must have been instantaneous."

"Well, it's a shockin' death. Howsomever, he brought it on hisself," remarked Jos.

"Let's see what he has got about him," said Neal. "He ought to have a pocket-book. Ay, here it is," he added, taking it from the coat, and opening it. "Here's a lot of bank-notes, Jos. What's the use o' these to a dead man? He can't spend 'em. Let's see how many there are," he added, hastily counting the notes. "Here's five tens — that's fifty for you, old boy. I'll keep the rest myself."

Jos clutched the notes with a greedy hand, for his cupidity was fairly roused, and crammed them into his breeches-pocket. But he had no sooner done so than his mind misgave him, and he said, "S'pose we was to be found out?"

"Who's to find us out?" rejoined Neal. "*He* won't tell. Don't be chicken-hearted. He's got a watch, with a thick gold chain. Look what a pretty little watch it is, Jos. It would be a pity to leave it."

"Well, it would be a pity," remarked the ostler.

"And here's a gold breast-pin, and studs in his shirt, and a signet-ring, and a purse — but precious little in it."

"Them ought to be walerable articles," said the ostler — "leastways the watch and chain."

"We'll share all fairly by-and-by," said Neal.

"Better share now," rejoined Jos. "Give me the watch and chain."

"No, I mean to keep the watch and chain for myself," rejoined Neal. "You're welcome to the studs, rings, and breast-pin," he added, handing him the articles in question. "There's the purse into the bargain. Them's diamond studs, old chap. Hold 'em towards the moon, and you'll see how they glitter."

"I'd liefer have the watch and chain," grumbled Jos.

"But I can't part with 'em," said Neal, securing the articles. "Now then, let's be off. Don't forget your pistol," he added, picking it up and handing it to him.

"I said as how it wur a handy weepen," remarked Jos; "and so Sir Hugh found it. What shall we do with the body?"

"Leave it where it is, to be sure," rejoined Neal. "It won't walk after us. We haven't time to bury it, and the Medway's too far off, or we might throw it in."

"We can't bury him, or throw him in the river, it's true, but we can put him in Kit's Coity House," rejoined Jos. "He may lie there for months without being diskivered."

"A bright idea. I'll warrant Sir Hugh won't come back to look for his brother," said Neal. "Lend a hand, old chap, and we'll carry him in at once."

"I don't like handlin' of a corpse," objected Jos. "But I mun do it, I reckon."

So between them they dragged the body into the

interior of the cromlech. They were occupied for a few minutes in rearing the dismal object in an angle of the stony pile, so as to screen it from observation, and had just completed their task, when they were alarmed by the sound of voices.

"Lord help us!" ejaculated Jos, his knees knocking together from fright. "There's people a-comin' to take us up."

"Be quick, fool!" cried Neal; adding, with a bitter imprecation, "I can't conceive what brings those folks here; but they can't be looking for us. How can they tell what has happened?"

"They *are* a-comin' here, curse 'em!" cried Jos, as the footsteps drew nearer.

It now became evident, from the sounds, that the party consisted of several persons; and it was also clear they had got a lantern with them, as the light could be seen through the outlet of the cromlech.

Neal now began to share his companion's alarm, and each of them crept into a corner of the sepulchre. By this time the party had come up, and a voice, which both of the terrified rogues recognised as that of Plessets, said,

"You're quite certain you heard a pistol fired hereabouts, Tom Rollings?"

"Sartin, Mr. Plessets," replied another voice. "The sound cum'd from Kit's Coity House, as I tow'd you. Why, bless us! here's a hat, sir — a gemman's hat!"

"Let me look at it!" cried Plessets, snatching it from him. "I know it," he added, with a loud exclamation. "It's Captain Chetwynd's hat!"

"And see!" exclaimed another person, holding down the lantern. "There's marks of a struggle here! There's blood upon the ground. Blood, Mr. Plessets! look at it!"

"Blood, undoubtedly!" ejaculated the landlord. "Captain Chetwynd has been murdered."

A thrill of horror pervaded the assemblage on this discovery. All concurred in opinion that some dark deed had been done, though they couldn't declare so positively as the landlord did that Captain Chetwynd was the victim.

The rogues inside Kit's Coity House heard these remarks with increased alarm, and Jos muttered to himself, "We shall be hanged. I knows we shall."

"Look here, sir!" cried Tom Rollings, again holding down the lantern close to the ground. "Look at these marks, sir. The body has been dragged into Kit's Coity House."

"Evidently so, Tom. We shall find it there, no doubt," rejoined the landlord.

On this, there was a simultaneous rush to the entrance of the cromlech. The first to go in was Tom Rollings. Close behind him came Plessets. The mouth of the sepulchre was blocked up by the rest of the party, all of whom were rustics.

As Tom Rollings, who was a great raw-boned

young farmer, held up the lantern, a ghastly spectacle was presented to their view. Big Tom himself absolutely recoiled.

Reared up in one corner, with the head against the stones, was the body of the slaughtered man, the wound in the breast being discernible through the open shirt, which was drenched with blood. It was a fearful sight.

There also, crouched in opposite corners, and each devoutly wishing that the earth would open and swallow him up, were the two rogues. No one amid the throng who beheld the miserable wretches at that moment, looking the very pictures of ruthless murderers, entertained the slightest doubt of their criminality — not the slightest.

But when they were seized and searched, and damning proofs of their guilt, as it seemed, found upon their persons, of what avail could be denial? All attempts at explanation were scouted, of course, and only served to increase the rage of the captors, who overwhelmed them with execrations.

"Why, here's the werry weepson as did the bloody deed!" cried Big Tom, pulling the pistol out of the ostler's pocket, and exhibiting it to the bystanders. "Look at it, mesters, it has just been let off."

"It's not the first time I've seen that pistol to-night," said Plessets. "I caught the two villains with it in my harness-room, but I little thought what they were contriving."

The pocket-book and the notes were next brought to light, and increased the excitement of the lookers-on.

"Here's what they've sold themselves for to Owd Nick!" cried Big Tom.

"Ay, they've got the devil's bargain sure enough, and bartered their precious souls for nothing," said Plessets, examining the notes. "These very bank-notes I myself gave to the poor gentleman they've so foully murdered. I can swear to the numbers. The rogues, you see, have shared their booty between 'em — but it's done 'em no good."

"Hangin's too good for such villains," cried Big Tom. "They ought to be hung in chains afore Kit's Coity House."

"And so they will be," cried a voice from behind.

"Ay, I knew we should be hanged," groaned Jos.

"Soh! villain, you confess your guilt at last?" cried Plessets.

"No, sir. I'm as innocent of the poor gen'l'man's blood as the babe unborn. If I'm hanged, an innocent man will suffer, Mr. Plessets. Hear what I've got to say, sir, afore you condemns me. Captain Chetwynd met his death by accident. There's one as can explain all — can't he, Neal?"

"Ay, to be sure he can," said the other. "I can explain all now, if they'll only let me."

But being fiercely interrupted by the throng, he concluded by protesting his innocence.

"Why, you unblushing villain!" cried Plessets, regarding him with abhorrence. "Dare you protest your innocence with your hands red with the blood of your victim? Ah! you may well hide them! But water won't cleanse them from the stain. That blood will cry out for Vengeance against you, and Vengeance won't be long delayed. You and your wretched associate will swing on the same gallows, and a precious pair will be disposed of. I shall never forgive myself for harbouring two such abominable miscreants."

"We shall be able to establish our innocence at the proper time, Mr. Plessets," said Neal, who had in some degree recovered his confidence.

"You put a bold face on the matter, Neal," said the landlord; "but you won't impose on me — nor on the judge and jury who will try you. You'll swing for the job, my lad. Pah! I'm half stifled in this place. It reeks of blood. Let us get out into the fresh air. Bring the villains along. And do you, Tom Rollings, and three other stout chaps, carry the poor captain among you to the Bell."

These injunctions were obeyed. Quitting the scene of the fearful catastrophe, the party marched down the hill-side, four of them carrying the body, and the rest guarding the prisoners.

VIII.

What became of the two Rogues.

DOWN the hill, and then along the high-road towards Aylesford, went the little troop, Plessets marching first, followed by half a dozen rustics guarding the prisoners, while Big Tom Rollings and three others brought up the rear, carrying the body of the unfortunate Captain Chetwynd, which they had laid upon a hurdle taken from a sheep-pen.

Hitherto, both prisoners had gone along quietly enough, but Neal meditated escape. An opportunity for making the attempt presently occurred. A foot-path across the fields shortened the road to the town, and while a gate was being opened to let the party through, Neal executed his design. By a sudden and vigorous effort he shook himself free from the two men who held him, knocked down Plessets, who attempted to catch hold of him, and ran off swiftly along the road. But as his pursuers were shouting lustily, and it was more than likely he might be stopped, after proceeding about a hundred yards he scrambled up a bank, broke through a hedge, and plunged into a hop-garden, where he found a secure shelter, for, though his pursuers

searched for hours, watched the hop-garden during the remainder of the night, and renewed their quest as soon as it became light, he could not be found.

Meanwhile, a very different fate had befallen his comrade.

Up to the moment of Neal's successful attempt, the possibility of escape had never entered the ostler's head. But the confusion caused by that occurrence gave him a chance of which he was sharp enough to avail himself, and while the general attention was turned towards Neal, he contrived to get loose, and fled as fast as his heels could carry him across the fields in the direction of the river.

He was heavily built, and by no means swift of foot in an ordinary way, but he now ran for life, and fear supplied him with unwonted activity. However, his recapture seemed certain. Big Tom Rollings and three other stout fellows were after him, having left the dead man to take care of himself.

Away dashed Jos across the field. How he got through the hedge at the bottom he could not tell, but he did get through it, tumbled down on the other side, but was up before Big Tom and the others could seize him. On again towards the river, between which and the field he was crossing a strip of land alone intervened.

A second hedge offered no greater impediment than the first. He was through it before even Big Tom, whose long legs cleared the ground in a mar-

vellous manner, could get near him. This time he did not tumble, but ran straight towards the Medway, and those behind him saw him throw off his upper garments, and make a vain attempt to kick off his clumsy hob-nailed boots.

"Dash my limbs! if he ain't a-goin' to swim for it," cried Big Tom to those with him. "He's pluckier than I thowt him. Look there! I tow'd ye so."

A heavy plunge.

On coming up, the pursuers could just distinguish a dark head above the surface of the stream.

"There he be, mates, swimmin' like an otter, but he mustna get off i' this way!" cried Big Tom. "Yonder's a boat just above. I'll get it loose, while two on ye run down to t' bridge."

They were stopped, however, by cries for help from the swimmer. He had not got half way across the river when his strength forsook him. His heavy boots and wet garments dragged him down. Finding himself sinking, he turned, and tried to regain the bank he had just quitted. In doing so he sank, but presently reappeared, and while vainly struggling to keep himself above water, yelled out, "Help! for Christ's sake! help!"

Then he again sank to rise no more.

Stupified by what they beheld, with his death-cry ringing in their ears, those on the bank waited

for a short time, in the vain expectation of his reappearance.

"I'm blessed if he ain't cheated the hangman," cried Big Tom, at last. "But we maun fish out the body. Off wi' ye, mates, and shout to the barge-men below bridge to look out. I'll go and loose yon boat. Here be a pratty night's work! one man shot, and another drowned."

In less than five minutes afterwards a boat was out with drags, but it was not until daylight that the body of the ostler was recovered, and it was then found in an oozy spot among the reeds, full half a mile below Aylesford.

By this second catastrophe, and by the escape and disappearance of the only surviving witness of the tragical incident at Kit's Coity House, the actual manner in which the unfortunate Captain Chetwynd met his death remained unknown. A frightful murder was supposed to have been perpetrated by two miscreants, one of whom had been drowned while endeavouring to swim across the Medway, and the other had evaded justice.

IX.

The Vow.

RATHER more than a week had elapsed since that terrible night. An inquest had been held at Aylesford, and a verdict of wilful murder recorded against Joshua Tarrant and Neal Evesham, the former of whom had been removed by death, and the latter had hitherto escaped justice. The erring and ill-fated Clarence Chetwynd was laid with his ancestors in the vaults of the little church belonging to Old Court. No suspicion whatever attached to Sir Hugh. His absence from home on the evening in question, and his return late at night, were easily accounted for. He frequently took long solitary rides at night — no one knew whither — and did not return till daybreak. There was nothing strange, therefore, in his being out on this particular night. No one had seen him at Aylesford except the two rogues, one of whom was disposed of, and the other did not dare to come forward — perhaps could not do so. Sir Hugh was not even examined. He let the affair take its course, volunteering no statement, but maintaining a stern silence. How he got through the painful duties imposed upon him by the inquest and the funeral was best known to himself; but his

firmness never deserted him. He saw the body laid out at the Bell, but he controlled the profound emotion caused by the fearful spectacle. He saw his brother's remains laid in the family vault beside their father's coffin, and, this last sad office performed, retired to his own room to brood upon his grief.

Two persons, however, had seen Sir Hugh on the fatal night, and could have testified against him. These were Amice and the old woman who attended upon her, Margaret Leigh. Sir Hugh looked forward to meeting Amice with dread; but neither she nor old Margaret appeared at the inquest, and Clarence's relations with Amice being wholly unknown, she was not summoned as a witness. Sir Hugh ascertained that she had quitted the cottage with old Margaret, but whither they had gone he could not learn.

Rather more than a week, as we have said, after the tragical occurrence, the unhappy author of his brother's death was seated in a large room in his ancient family residence, Old Court, in Kent. A magnificent room it was, and perfect as when built in the sixteenth century. Wainscoted nearly to the top with oak, black as ebony from age, the upper part of the walls were covered with the arms and alliances of the family, moulded, painted, and gilt. The ceiling was enriched with exquisite pendants; the deep bay-windows, glowing with blazonry, looked out upon a broad terrace, upon a fine old-fashioned

garden, and upon an extensive park, abounding in noble timber, and sweeping down in long glades to a lake. Over the enormous carved mantelpiece hung a portrait of Sir Urian Chetwynd, by whom the mansion was erected. The room was furnished with elaborately carved oak chairs, settees covered with Utrecht velvet, and oak tables of various sizes, black as the panels of the walls. The floor was of polished oak, and only partially covered by a rich Turkey carpet.

A large Indian screen surrounded the table beside which Sir Hugh was seated. His attitude and the expression of his features, so far as it could be discerned through the hand that tightly clasped his brow, showed that his bosom was ravaged by the sharpest pangs of remorse. Even in the short time that had elapsed since the catastrophe in which he had been engaged, a marked change had taken place in his appearance. Always sallow, his hue had become livid; his looks were haggard, his eyes blood-shot. He remained in the attitude described until aroused by a man-servant, who had noiselessly approached him. He then raised his head, and quite startled the butler, a middle-aged, respectable man, by the look he fixed upon him.

"Beg pardon for disturbing you, Sir Hugh," said the butler, respectfully, "but a lady desires to speak with you. I explained to her that you are ill, and had given strict orders that no one should

be admitted to your presence. Still, she insists upon seeing you."

"Insists, Jodrell!" exclaimed Sir Hugh. "Who is she?"

"She did not give her name," replied the servant. "But she is young, and in great distress. To tell truth, Sir Hugh, her sad looks quite touched my heart, so I couldn't help bringing the message to you. I hope you will see her."

"It must be Amice — it can be no other," muttered Sir Hugh. "The sight of her will kill me. I cannot, will not, see her, Jodrell," he added, aloud.

"She won't leave the house unless you do, Sir Hugh," remonstrated the butler. "Some very painful scene, I fear, may be the consequence of your refusal to grant her an interview."

"Bring her to me, then."

And Jodrell, immediately availing himself of the permission thus reluctantly conceded, quitted the room.

"I have done wrong to admit her," cried Sir Hugh, springing to his feet. "Her reproaches will kill me. But what matter! Come how it may, death will be a relief to my present sufferings."

Just then the door opened, and the afflicted lady entered.

It was she Sir Hugh expected — she he dreaded to behold. Casting one look at her, he shudder-

ingly averted his gaze. But that hasty glance sufficed to show him how wofully she was altered. Without again venturing to regard her, Sir Hugh motioned her to take the seat which was placed for her by Jodrell.

It was not until some moments after the butler's departure that a word was uttered on either side. At length the silence becoming insupportable, Sir Hugh, by a great effort, broke it. But even while speaking he did not look at her.

"I have consented to receive you, Amice," he said. "What would you?"

"Where is your brother?" she rejoined, in a voice which hissed in his ears, and shook his frame.

"You know what has happened," he replied, in hoarse accents, as if the answer were wrung from him by torture.

"I know that he has been murdered!" she cried. "But by whom? I do not believe that he was shot by miscreants who were concealed in the cromlech, though circumstances would seem to substantiate the story. But the truth is known to you. Answer me as you shall answer to Heaven. By whose hand did your brother die?"

Sir Hugh looked at her for a moment, and then replied, steadily,

"He fell by my hand."

"I knew it!" she exclaimed. "I was warned of his fate. I will tell you how. On that sad night

when he quitted me, never to return, I vainly endeavoured to shake off the terrors that assailed me. As time wore on, my fears increased to such a pitch, that, becoming half frenzied, I was about to rush forth into the darkness of the night, when suddenly I heard the report of a pistol. I heard it distinctly. A fearful vision seemed suddenly presented to me. I beheld Clarence stretched on the ground, and you, his brother — his assassin — standing over him."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, astounded. "But I am not so guilty as you suppose. I have been the unwitting cause of my brother's death, but I am not his assassin. The whole truth was not revealed by the vision which your excited fancy conjured up. Clarence was accidentally slain — accidentally, I repeat. I shall never be free from remorse for the deed, but it was my last thought to injure him. I had no weapon with me, but he came armed to the meeting."

"I know he did. I besought him not to take a pistol with him! Oh! that he had listened to my counsel!"

"Would he had!" exclaimed Sir Hugh. "How much distress and misery might have been spared you! — how much wretchedness and remorse might have been spared me. Hear the exact truth, Amice. Yielding to ungovernable passion, Clarence presented a pistol at my head. Even now I will not suffer myself to believe that he meant to use it. I seized

his arm, and in the struggle — Heaven, or the powers of darkness alone know how! — the deadly weapon was turned against his own breast — and he fell.”

“No more! — no more, I entreat you!” she implored.

Thinking from her looks that she was about to faint, he rose to assist her. But even in this extremity she shrank from him.

“Pray do not touch me!” she cried. “I shall be better presently.” After a short pause, she continued: “I believe what you tell me, Sir Hugh, and entirely acquit you of all intention of injuring your brother. I will pray for you — I will try to forgive you, and I trust I may succeed — but you do not know how much I have to forgive.”

“What mean you?” he exclaimed, looking at her with amazement.

“You have robbed me of a husband,” she rejoined, with a look of indescribable anguish. “Clarence and I were secretly wedded.”

“Gracious Heaven! why was I not told of this before?” he cried.

“It was not my fault that you were kept in ignorance of the fact, Sir Hugh,” she returned. “But you will now comprehend the extent of my affliction — of my despair. I loved Clarence better than life. I have lost him. But I shall not long survive the

loss I have sustained. There is but one object that can make me cling to life for a while."

And she paused.

"I guess," said Sir Hugh, looking at her with profound sympathy. "Poor soul! you expect to become a mother?"

"Yes," she replied, faintly.

"Hear my solemn promise, and doubt not its fulfilment," said Sir Hugh, with impressive earnestness. "The child that shall be born to you shall inherit this house and all my property. This I swear, and I call upon Heaven to register my vow! Live, therefore, for your child, Amice — live to see Old Court occupied by Clarence's offspring long after I have passed away!"

"I dare not indulge the dream," she rejoined, sadly. "I cannot delude myself into the belief that I shall recover from the terrible shock I have endured. If my babe be permitted to see the light, I shall have lived long enough."

"I trust you may be spared for many, many years, Amice, but should your fears be realised, your child shall find a father in me. Make this house your home. You shall be absolute mistress here."

"No," she rejoined. "I do not think Clarence would have wished me to become an inmate of this house, and his wishes are sacred to me. Forgive me if I add, that I could not" — and she hesitated

—“after what has happened, dwell in the same house with you.”

And the expression of horror, coupled with aversion, which had quitted her face for a time, returned to it.

“Then I will leave Old Court, and surrender it to you,” said Sir Hugh. “I will go abroad. I have nothing left to live for — nothing. All my hopes are blighted,” he added, with a look of unutterable misery. “With a heart as, I believe, capable of strong and deep affections, I have met with no return. In every instance, my friendship has been misplaced and betrayed. My brother, whom I loved, whom I watched over like a father, whom I preserved from infamy and dishonour, requited me with hate, regarding me as an obstacle in his path; while she whom I adored with a passionate tenderness, to which words fail to give expression, bestowed her affections on another. And now, as the climax of my woes, my hands are inadvertently stained with my brother’s blood. Such accumulated miseries are sufficient to drive a man to despair. I pray that my reason may be preserved to me, for I feel it totter. I shall never find peace except in the grave — perhaps not even there.”

Overcome by emotion, he then ceased, and the silence was only broken by his sobs. Amice offered him no consolation.

"Hear me, Amice," he said, when he had in some degree recovered his composure. "Life will be henceforth of no value to me, and I shall be rejoiced to lay down the burden. I say this," he continued, with increasing firmness, "because I would not have you overrate the offer I am about to make. My best reparation for the injury I have unintentionally done you, and the only reparation likely to relieve my troubled conscience, will be to leave you in possession of this house, where you can remain wholly undisturbed until you become a mother, when I will secure the property to your child. Fear no further annoyance from me. After to-night you shall see me no more. To-morrow I will quit the country, and hide my griefs in some foreign city — Rome, most likely."

"No, Sir Hugh," she cried, "you shall not make this great sacrifice for me. I cannot suffer you to leave this house on my account. Ever since I have received the frightful intelligence of my beloved husband's death, I have been in such a state of distraction that I could form no plans for the future. I instantly quitted the scene of our brief happiness, which had become intolerable to me since my great loss, and sought temporary shelter. I know not yet what I shall do next. All I desire is to hide myself from the world, which has become hateful to me, but I could not thus withdraw myself without a final interview with you. I have now learnt the truth,

and am satisfied. I thank you for your offer, but decline it. Farewell for ever!"

And she rose to depart.

"Reflect! — oh! reflect, Amice, before you depart thus," he cried. "Do not yield to these wild and distracting impulses, which urge you to hide your grief in solitude. You will find more solace for your troubled breast here than elsewhere. You think nothing can afford you consolation, but time will assuage your grief. Your affliction is not aggravated, as in my case, by remorse. Make the trial. Stay here for a few days. If you eventually decide to remain — as I trust you will — I will at once depart, and leave you absolute mistress of the place."

"I cannot, Sir Hugh — I cannot. My resolution is taken."

She made an effort to leave, but her strength, which had been waning, now utterly forsook her, and she would have fallen if Sir Hugh had not caught her in his arms.

For a moment he gazed upon her lovely features, now wrapped as if in death, with passionate admiration. Then placing her upon a couch, he rang the bell violently. The summons was almost instantly answered by Jodrell, who manifested great concern on perceiving the unfortunate lady's condition. Sir Hugh sent him instantly for Mrs. Mansfield, the housekeeper, and in a very short space of time a matronly personage appeared, accompanied by two

younger female servants. Having learned from Jodrell what had occurred, Mrs. Mansfield came provided with restoratives. These were applied, and, ere long, Amice exhibited signs of returning consciousness, but, when she came to herself, she was evidently too feeble to leave the house. She therefore offered no further remonstrance when Mrs. Mansfield proposed to take her to her own room, and she was accordingly removed thither and carefully tended.

After passing a few hours of great anxiety, Sir Hugh sent for Mrs. Mansfield, and inquired about her charge.

"We have got her to bed, poor lady," replied the housekeeper, "and have made her some chicken broth; but I could only get her to take a little warm jelly and wine. Poor creature!" she continued, "her mind seems to wander. She rambles very strangely, and asks where she is, and when I tell her, she wants to get up, and we have some difficulty in keeping her in bed. But she is somewhat quieter now. She will be better if she can get to sleep, I think," pursued the good woman, "for as far as I can make out, she has not slept for the last week."

Having heard all she had to say, Sir Hugh bade her to return to the lady, and let him know if any improvement took place.

Later on Mrs. Mansfield reappeared, and informed Sir Hugh that the poor dear creature had fallen into a sweet sleep.

"She looks like an angel, Sir Hugh," said the housekeeper, "and I only wish you could see her dear beautiful face. I feel sure she will be better in the morning."

"I hope so," said Sir Hugh, earnestly. "Take care of her, Mansfield — take care of her as you would of your own daughter."

"Lord love you, Sir Hugh, I haven't got a daughter, as you know very well, but I'll take just as much care of her as if I were her mother."

"That's all I require, Mansfield. Good night!"

And the housekeeper withdrew.

It was long before Sir Hugh retired to rest, but even when he threw himself upon his couch he could not sleep. Wearied out at last towards morning, he fell into a heavy slumber, from which he was roused by a tap at the door. Finding it was Mrs. Mansfield who knocked, he instantly sprang from his couch, and, wrapping himself in his dressing-gown, went forth to her. The housekeeper's frightened looks showed him that some calamity had happened, and he could scarcely muster courage to inquire what it was.

"Speak!" he cried at last. "Don't keep me in suspense. What has happened?"

"She is gone," replied Mrs. Mansfield, bursting into tears. "But don't blame me, Sir Hugh. I couldn't help it. Indeed I couldn't."

"Gone!" he exclaimed, "what do you mean, woman? Is she dead?"

"No, Sir Hugh, she has left the house. I blame myself for leaving her, but she slept so sweetly that I could not believe there was danger, and thinking I might disturb her, I went to bed in another room. About four o'clock I returned to look after her, and found she was gone. Upon investigation, it appeared that she must have got up quietly, dressed herself, and quitted the house by one of the dining-room windows, without being discovered. Aware of your strict charges respecting her, and feeling how great would be your displeasure at her departure in this manner, I called up Jodrell, and ordered him to wake the other men, and send them out to look for the poor lady, and bring her back, if possible. Alas!" she cried, with a fresh outburst of tears, "they have all just returned, but she cannot be found — she cannot be found. Oh dear! oh dear!"

"Woman, you have killed me!" cried Sir Hugh, in a despairing voice.

And he rushed back to his room, and closed the door upon her.

Throughout that day, and for many days and many weeks to come, search was made for the unfortunate lady in every direction, but nothing could be heard of her.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

BOOK I.

LUCETTA AND HER LOVERS.

1.

In which Lucetta receives two Offers.

It was the winter season at Brighton, and a very gay season it was. The place was as full as it well could be; the weather all that could be desired by those who rode with the Brookside harriers, or followed the Southdown fox-hounds, by those who drove upon the cliffs, sauntered on the esplanades, or wandered on the beach. There were morning concerts and evening concerts; military bands and German bands — rather too many, indeed, of the latter; private balls every night; public balls at the Pavilion, where, whatever may be alleged to the contrary by the decriers of the First Gentleman in Europe, an unequalled suite of apartments is to be found; and, above all, there were lots of dinners — and such dinners as could not be surpassed at the best tables in town during June and July.

But the dinners that exceeded all others in taste and splendour — dinners rivalling, if not exceeding, the rarest banquets given at Saint Petersburg or Moscow — were those given by Mr. Courcy Dormer, an American gentleman — reputed a Cræsus — who had lately come over from Russia, and fixed himself

in a large house — or rather two houses, which he had thrown into one — in the best terrace in Kemp Town. Not only were Mr. Dormer's dinners the most *recherché* imaginable, but they were followed by concerts, at which the best singers and musicians took part, under the direction of the experienced Herr Kuhé. No wonder these sumptuous entertainments became the universal theme of conversation, and that every effort was made to be present at them.

One night a ball was given by Mrs. Courcy Dormer. All the suite of apartments, which were furnished with the most exquisite taste, were thrown open, and illuminated by a thousand tapers. Lively strains of music, proceeding from a conservatory where the band was placed, resounded through the inner rooms, in which dancing went on.

In the drawing-room the amiable hostess received her guests, and so numerous were they on this occasion that the doors of the dancing-rooms were environed, and it was a difficult matter to obtain an entrance.

Amidst the throng at this doorway stood the affable Mr. Courcy Dormer, welcoming all his friends with a smile, and ready to find partners for such as desired to join the waltz. There were many lovely girls engaged in the dance, but there was one who eclipsed all the rest. So singularly graceful was she, that it was a positive pleasure to watch her movements. Her figure was perfectly symmetrical, and

its exquisite proportions were now admirably displayed in the mazy dance. She was tall and slight, with the tiniest and prettiest feet imaginable.

We have not said a word as yet about her features, but they corresponded with her figure, and were of the highest order of beauty — a lovely oval face, lighted up by black eyes of Oriental size and splendour, exquisitely pencilled brows and luxuriant black tresses, taken back from a forehead smooth and white as Parian marble. Her features were of a pure classical mould, with a beautiful mouth and proudly-cut chin; and when her rosy lips are parted by a smile — and what an enchanting smile it was — two rows of pearls might be discovered.

This charming creature was in the spring-tide of her beauty, for she could not be more than eighteen, even if she had attained that age. Such was the witchery she exercised, that every young man who was presented to her fancied himself in love; and many of them really were so.

About six weeks before her appearance at Mrs. Courcy Dormer's ball, the lovely Lucetta Chetwynd had come to Brighton with her aunt, Lady Danvers, and had at once created a sensation. Nothing had previously been heard of her beauty, for she had not yet been brought out in town, but fame soon trumpeted forth her attractions with its hundred tongues; and if it could not exaggerate her beauty, it magnified her wealth.

Lucetta was an only child, heiress of Old Court, and of the large domains attached to it; but even this did not suffice, for her father, Sir Hugh, was reported to have saved an immense deal of money. To be a great heiress in these mercenary days is the greatest recommendation, and a very plain girl with a quarter of a million is accounted a beauty; but be this true or not, a vast number of disinterested young men emphatically declared that Lucetta needed no fortune to recommend her. However, as she happened to have a fortune, so much the better.

Lucetta was a daring and dashing horsewoman, constantly rode with the hounds, and more than once had got the brush. To see her on her favourite horse Mazeppa, was, perhaps, to see her at her best, for her faultless figure was fully displayed by her riding-habit, and her features never looked so animated as when she was going along at a rattling pace, with the music of a good pack in her ears; but see her wherever you might, whether careering over the breezy downs, gathering fresh roses from the healthful and delicious air — whether crossing the valley of the Ouse, and jumping hedge, gate, or dyke — whether in the crowded esplanades, or enchanting a listening circle with a voice as delicious as that of Carlotta, or weaving magic chains around those with whom she danced — under each and every aspect she was bewitching and irresistible.

Lucetta's most ardent admirer, and the first on her list — if she kept one — was Rainald Fanshaw, an officer in the — — Hussars, then quartered at the Preston Barracks. Captain Fanshaw was the handsomest man in the regiment — and the regiment boasted three or four very handsome men. He was above six feet in height, with a splendid figure, adorable drooping whiskers, a well-formed nose, and fine expressive eyes, of which it was supposed he could make good use. He liked his profession, and had seen some service, having been in the Crimea. His manners were refined and captivating, if he pleased, but he was apt to be supercilious. In fact, he had been made so much of by manœuvring mammas and designing daughters, that there is no wonder he should be a little spoiled. Rainald Fanshaw was, indeed, a very eligible *parti* — by birth and fortune a match for any lady — an only son — his mother an earl's daughter — his father a baronet. He was well enough off now, and had great expectations.

It was while following the Brookside harriers that Rainald first made Lucetta's acquaintance. He had heard her praises sung so loudly by some of his brother-officers at the mess dinner on the night before, that he went out with a certain curiosity to behold the wonder, but prepared to be disappointed, for no girl had yet come up to the ideal raised by his fastidious taste. He was completely taken by surprise when he was presented to Lucetta at Telscombe

Tye, where the harriers met, and was ravished by her beauty. Throughout the morning he kept as much as possible by her side, and was so charmed by her performance, as well as by her wit and vivacity, that before the day was over, he, Rainald, the unconquerable, was hopelessly lost.

Since then he had paid her great attention — had constantly joined her in her rides upon the cliffs or on the downs, and called at Lady Danvers's house in Adelaide-crescent — making it quite clear to his brother-officers that he was seriously hit.

But Rainald was not the only captive enchained in Lucetta's fetters. The Hon. Gerard Hunsdon, Lord Dulverton's second son, a very smart little fellow, vain, somewhat of a coxcomb, was desperately smitten; as was also Mr. March Ripley, eldest son of the rich banker of that name, and a partner in his father's house. Besides these, there were many other aspirants, but they are scarcely worth notice. Young Ripley, who not unnaturally had a notion of the paramount importance of wealth, and whose father was a millionaire, entertained not the slightest doubt that he should be accepted by Lucetta, and settle matters with Sir Hugh, so soon as he could obtain his own consent. But though very much in love, he was excessively cautious, and, though often on the point of doing so, could never bring himself to utter the decisive words. As to Gerard Hunsdon, he had certainly not the recommendation of wealth,

but he relied upon his good social position, his old and ennobled family, and his aristocratic connexions. Moreover, he had a tolerably good opinion of his personal appearance. He had a Spanish cast of countenance, an olive complexion, eyes large and black, languid or fierce, according to the expression he chose to give them, moustaches black and sharply twisted, and locks of a blue-black shade, like the raven's wing. Though small of stature, he was well formed, and remarkable for the aristocratic smallness of his feet and hands. He valsed admirably, and on this account, if on no other, Lucetta liked to dance with him.

No greater contrast could be found between this smart little scion of nobility, with his Spanish physiognomy, than March Ripley, whose somewhat burly frame, regular features, carefully deprived of beard and whisker, fresh complexion, clear grey eyes, and light-brown curling locks, were of the true Saxon type. If not distinguished-looking, March Ripley was well bred, and handsome enough to pass muster, even if he had not been son to a millionaire. Having an unmistakable tendency to stoutness, he tried all plans, except those of Mr. Banting, to keep himself down, rose early, walked, rode, and drove, but without much effect on his too, too solid flesh. He kept lots of horses, both for saddle and harness, and drove all kinds of drags, and his mail phaeton was the sight of the cliffs. He had tried to prevail upon

Lucetta to take a seat beside him, but could not succeed. Up to a certain time Gerard Hunsdon and March Ripley had gone on quietly enough, but when Rainald Fanshaw came on the scene, their tranquillity was mightily disturbed. The young banker began seriously to debate the necessity of making up his mind, while little Hunsdon began to fear that the prize might be snatched from him, unless he secured it without delay. Not that either of them had the slightest right to assume that Lucetta cared for him in particular. She chatted good humouredly to both, but showed no preference for either, and if they had not been blinded by self-love, they must have discovered that she was perfectly indifferent to them. However, in spite of their obtuseness, they were quite quick enough to detect a dangerous rival in Rainald Fanshaw. It soon became evident that the blind god had winged his keenest shaft up to the feather in the gallant captain's heart, and if he had aimed another at Lucetta's breast they could not be quite sure that it had glanced harmlessly aside. Both, therefore, determined to bring the matter to an issue at Mrs. Courcy Dormer's ball, without either being in the slightest degree aware that Captain Fanshaw had come to a similar determination.

The important evening arrived, an evening to which many others besides the three suitors had looked forward with pleasurable anticipation, and

utterly unconscious of what fate had in store for her, Lucetta went to the ball with her aunt, Lady Danvers.

Never had she looked better than on this eventful occasion. Her toilette was exquisite, as it could not fail to be, since Madame Mercier had exerted her utmost skill to produce it. Her entrance was heralded by an irrepressible burst of admiration. Scarcely had she appeared, than the Honourable Gerard Hunsdon, who was lingering in the drawing-room with Mrs. Dormer, came up and engaged her for a valse. Just as the little preux chevalier was marching off with her in triumph they encountered the robust young banker, who looked disappointed, but was consoled by the promise that she would go through the next dance with him.

The young banker gave place to another claimant — Rainald Fanshaw, whose handsome features looked a little disturbed.

"I thought you promised me this valse, Miss Chetwynd," he said, in a slightly reproachful tone.

"Did I?" she cried; "I really forget."

And she glanced at her partner as if expecting him to retire. But Gerard had no such intention.

"I certainly cannot think of surrendering you, Miss Chetwynd," he remarked.

"Well, then, it must be the next valse, Captain Fanshaw," she remarked to him. "Please forgive my stupidity."

And the look she gave him reconciled him to the delay.

Gerard Hunsdon, who had been a little put out by the interruption, and who wanted to be free from his rival, hurried his partner into the dancing-room, and in another minute they were engaged in the valse.

The young banker followed them, but Rainald stepped into the card-room, where some old fogies were engaged with a rubber. Lady Danvers remained in the room into which the guests were first shown, and took a seat on a sofa.

Her ladyship must have been beautiful in her younger days, for there were traces of beauty about her still, though she was past fifty, but she looked delicate, and her figure was attenuated, apparently by recent illness. Indeed, she had all the appearance of an invalid. She was attired in black velvet, and wore exquisite point lace and magnificent diamonds. Her ladyship was the widow of General Sir Warwick Danvers, K.C.B., an Indian officer of distinction, and her usual place of abode was Cheltenham, but this winter she had come to Brighton, as she declared, for the sake of her niece.

Having received almost all her guests, the amiable Mrs. Courcy Dormer sat down by Lady Danvers and began to express her unbounded admiration of her niece.

"Lucetta is a very charming girl, I must own,

and I *do* feel proud of her," said Lady Danvers. "Having no children of my own, as you are aware, my dear Mrs. Dormer, I look upon her as a daughter, and, indeed, I should like to have her with me altogether, were it possible."

"Sir Hugh Chetwynd would scarcely consent to such an arrangement, I should imagine," remarked Mrs. Dormer, with a smile.

"No, I don't expect it," replied Lady Danvers, sighing slightly. "But I fancy Lucetta would be happier with me."

"Happier with your ladyship than with her father!" exclaimed Mrs. Dormer, surprised.

"Simply for this reason. Old Court, though a very fine old house, is extremely dull. Sir Hugh keeps very little company, and the little he does keep is not of a kind to please a young girl just coming out into the world, like Lucetta. You see how fond she is of society, and how well fitted — I think I may be excused for saying so — she is to shine in it. Imagine, then, what a dreary, monotonous existence it must be for a lively girl to be shut up in a solitary country-house, with nothing whatever to amuse her. Not that she complains. On the contrary, she declares that she delights in the place, and finds constant occupation at it, so that her time never hangs heavily. I fancy she is fond of her garden, and an odd old-fashioned garden it is, not a bit to my taste; I would modernise it

altogether if it were mine — but Loo declares she dotes upon the quaint alleys and parterres. Then she takes long rides, and sometimes goes out with the hounds during the hunting season. Moreover, she visits the sick and the poor, for she is quite a young Lady Bountiful, and what with music, and books, and other employments, she says she is never dull.”

“And I am inclined to believe her,” remarked Mrs. Dormer.

“She is willing to make the best of it, that’s all I can say. Whenever I pass a week in the gloomy old house, with its great sombre apartments, its long dark corridors, and its bedrooms that look as if they were haunted, I get a fit of the horrors, and am ready to die of ennui. I go there as rarely as possible, having no taste for such gloomy places. They are all very well in novels, but in reality they are intolerable. No, give me a house in Kensington Gardens, or at Cheltenham, or Brighton, or Paris; but, in an inaccessible part of Kent, one might as well be out of the world.”

“It is rather fortunate for your charming niece that she does not share your ladyship’s opinions,” observed Mrs. Dormer. “I think I could contrive to pass a week in a country-house such as you describe, and should not be afraid even of the haunted rooms.”

“Don’t make the experiment, my dear Mrs.

Dormer. You'll repent it," said Lady Danvers, almost with a shudder. "You won't find it as agreeable as this enchanting house, or as your other house at Saint Petersburg. I sometimes regret my palatial abode at Calcutta, for Indian life, in its way, is enchanting."

"I should think so. Never having seen Old Court, I can't offer an opinion about the place; but, however dull and disagreeable it may be, I don't fancy your charming niece will occupy it long. But here she comes. And to judge from her expressive looks, she has something to communicate to your ladyship."

With this she arose, and, smiling at Lucetta as she approached with Gerard Hunsdon, pointed with her fan to the seat she had just vacated.

Lucetta then withdrew her arm from that of her partner, and sat down beside her aunt, while Gerard, with a formal bow, retired, looking, however, somewhat discomposed.

"What do you think, aunt?" said Lucetta, in a low voice, and casting down her eyes as she spoke. "He has proposed."

"I'm not surprised in the least, my dear. I expected it," replied Lady Danvers, in a listless tone. "I could read the offer in his countenance. And you have rejected him, of course?"

"Of course I have, aunt," she replied, raising her lovely eyes. "But I felt rather sorry for him."

"Oh, you needn't waste your pity upon him, my

love. He'll recover from the blow, I'll engage. As this is your first offer, the sensation is new, and no doubt makes your heart flutter a little, but you'll get used to it in time. The novelty was quite worn off when General Danvers proposed to me. But here comes another aspirant," she added, as Mr. March Ripley approached. "Recollect that he is the son of a millionaire, and treat him accordingly."

The young banker bowed to Lady Danvers, who received him very graciously.

"Don't fatigue yourself, Lucetta," said her ladyship, as her niece took Mr. Ripley's arm.

"Oh, I am never tired with dancing, aunt," returned Lucetta. "And I don't see how one *can* be tired by a quadrille."

"Not if you have an agreeable partner," rejoined her aunt, again smiling very encouragingly at young Ripley, who persuaded himself that if he wanted one, he should have a powerful advocate in Lady Danvers.

"A very fine young man," thought her ladyship, contemplating the young banker's broad shoulders as he departed with her niece, "and I shouldn't be sorry to have him for a nephew. Oh, my dear Mrs. Dormer," she added, as that lady resumed her seat, "you were quite right. I must let you into the secret. Lucetta has just had her first offer. But it won't do," she added, tapping her small hand with her fan — "it won't do."

"I can easily understand that. But I don't think it will be the only offer she will receive to-night. But now, my dear Lady Danvers, will you let me ask you a question? — rather a delicate question — but you know I feel a real interest in your niece. What sort of person is her father, Sir Hugh Chetwynd?"

"I am glad you have asked me the question, since my answer will explain exactly how Lucetta is situated. Sir Hugh is a very singular person indeed — almost mysterious, if such a description did not sound romantic and absurd. He is not precisely a misanthrope, but he shuns society as much as possible — never visits — rarely stirs abroad — but lives like a recluse in his old family mansion. He may take a solitary ride in the country, but I do not think anything would induce him to go to town, or to come here to Brighton. I have often tried to induce him to visit me at Cheltenham, but never could prevail. He is so odd in his manner, so morose — I was going to say savage — that I always feel uneasy in his company."

"But I hope he is kind to his daughter?" inquired Mrs. Dormer, anxiously.

"Oh yes, he is devotedly fond of her," replied Lady Danvers, "and Lucetta quite understands him. Though Sir Hugh's cold and austere manner repels me, I have the profoundest respect for him. He has many noble qualities, and does a great deal of good."

But he doesn't seem to belong to the age. He should have lived three centuries ago, for his dark, grave countenance and figure seem to belong to the Tudors, and there is a portrait of one of his ancestors who flourished in the time of Bloody Mary, and assisted at some of the Smithfield Burnings, which exactly resembles him. I am rather afraid he may become a pervert to the Romish faith himself, for he manifests tendencies that way, and might go over altogether if Lucetta did not operate as a wholesome check."

"Has he been long a widower?" asked Mrs. Dormer.

"Many, many years," replied Lady Danvers. "My poor sister Sophy died within twelve months after the birth of her daughter. As I have told you thus much of our family history, dear Mrs. Danvers, I may as well tell more of it. Sophia Bellasis, my sister, was ten years younger than myself, and very pretty and attractive; but pretty and attractive as she was, I don't think Sir Hugh was at all in love with her. He did not even pretend to be so. The marriage came about in this way. Sir Hugh had been greatly afflicted by the tragical fate of his brother, Captain Chetwynd, who was shot by robbers near Aylesford, in Kent, and became exceedingly melancholy, leading much such a lonely life as he does now, when, in order to find some distraction, he went to winter at Rome, and there we met him.

He frequently accompanied us in our visits to the churches, palaces, and ruins of the Eternal City, and, as he is extremely well informed, he interested us by his conversation. After being with us almost daily for a month, he suddenly disappeared, and we thought he had gone without taking leave, and poor Sophy then found out how much she was attached to him. Most unexpectedly he returned from Castellamare. He must easily have divined Sophy's secret, for her joy on beholding him again was too evident to be mistaken. But he was not the man to trifle with any woman's feelings; and finding how matters stood, he had a long explanation with her, in the course of which he told her that his heart was buried with another, but his hand was hers, if she chose to take it."

"A singular declaration, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Dormer.

"Poor Sophy was silly and sentimental enough to accept the offer. All the love was on her side. Shortly afterwards we returned to England, and they were married. Of course they resided at Old Court, and Sophy was charmed with the house, with the old gardens, the park, and everything about it. But she was not destined to enjoy the place long. Lucetta was born, and then Sir Hugh's icy heart was melted, for he began to manifest some tenderness towards his wife. But it was too late. Consumption had declared itself, and she had only a

brief taste of the happiness that might have been hers if she had been longer spared. However, she *was* happy for a time, and her last illness was cheered by the unremitting attentions of her husband."

Here Lady Danvers paused, evidently affected by the recollections that pressed upon her. Presently she resumed:

"After this loss, Sir Hugh became liable to the same melancholy fits as before, but they now seized him with greater frequency and intensity. His only solace seemed to be his child, and if he had not possessed this little treasure, I am persuaded he would have died long ago. All his thoughts were wrapped up in her, and during her tender years he could not bear her out of his sight. She was never allowed to quit Old Court until she was fourteen, and then I and some friends to whom he would listen had much ado to induce him to relax his strictness."

"My dear Lady Danvers, you describe a most interesting person," said Mrs. Dormer. "I hope I may some day see Sir Hugh. Whatever plan he has adopted with his daughter, the result has been eminently successful. But here she comes again," she added, as Lucetta entered the room with the young banker. "If I am any judge, Mr. Ripley has met with the same fate as Gerard Hunsdon."

"You are right, my dear Mrs. Dormer," said Lady

Danvers, noticing the young banker's blank looks of disappointment.

"Is there no hope for me, Miss Chetwynd?" said March, in a low voice, just before relinquishing Lucetta.

"None whatever, Mr. Ripley," she rejoined, in a freezing tone.

Not being sufficiently master of himself to hide his confusion, the young banker became very red in the face, stammered out a few words to Lady Danvers, and retreated.

"I see what has happened, Lucetta," said Lady Danvers, as her niece sat down beside her; "but really, my dear child, you are very unfeeling to laugh at the poor man."

"I really cannot help laughing, aunt," she rejoined; "Mr. Ripley looked so very absurd when he addressed me on what he called 'a serious and momentous question.' I wish you could have seen him, aunt. You would have laughed too."

"I should have done nothing of the sort, you silly child. Mr. Ripley is immensely rich, and you treat him as if he was as poor as Mr. Hunsdon."

"I don't care for his riches, aunt. Till this morning, he and Mr. Hunsdon were objects of indifference to me, but now that they have ventured to propose, I hate them both."

"You are a very extraordinary girl, Loo, and so bent upon having your own way, that I shall cease

to advise you. I think you had better not dance any more this evening."

"Not dance, aunt! I am engaged to Captain Fanshaw for the next valse, and here he comes to claim me."

And as Rainald approached, she arose quickly, took his arm, and they disappeared.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, my dear Lady Danvers," said Mrs. Dormer, once more taking her seat on the sofa, "your charming niece will have a third offer, and I would almost venture to predict the result."

"It would be useless to predict anything about such a madcap," rejoined Lady Danvers. "I am quite angry with her for rejecting that very agreeable Mr. Ripley."

"But Captain Fanshaw is far handsomer than Mr. Ripley, and far more agreeable," said Mrs. Dormer.

"But not half so rich," sighed Lady Danvers.

II.

A third Offer.

THE valse was over.

But Lucetta, instead of returning to her chaperone, as she had previously done, sat down with her partner in the card-room.

They were not unobserved. Both Hunsdon and March Ripley watched them from a distance with jealous eyes. Though Rainald spoke in a very low voice, and though he did not even look at the fair creature he addressed, there could be no doubt, from the effect of his words upon her, that he was declaring his passion, and in very fervid terms. Lucetta looked down, her colour heightened, and she agitated her fan quickly, as if oppressed by the heat of the room. All at once Rainald paused, and cast an ardent look at her, as if imploring a reply. She did not respond to the appeal, but continued to agitate her fan, and Rainald's manner became more impassioned. The green-eyed monster tore the breasts of the two wretched spectators of the scene. But, as we are unconcerned, we will go nearer, and hear what Rainald has to say.

"How am I to interpret your silence, Miss Chetwynd?" he cried. "Favourably, I trust. I have

told you how ardently I love you, and have essayed to convince you that my life's happiness depends upon your decision. I know that I am unworthy of your love, for you appear to me as a superior being, but I hope to win it by my devotion. I offer you the hand of an honourable man, and a heart which will never cease to beat for you. May I hope to call you mine?"

Lucetta could not help being moved by his fervour. She raised her lovely eyes towards him, and her bosom palpitated as she spoke. Her words vibrated to his heart's core.

"Do not ask me for an answer now, Captain Fanshaw, I beg of you," she said. "I must have a little time for consideration. I must consult my aunt before venturing to decide."

"But give me a hope, Lucetta," he cried. "Pardon me if I venture to call you by that name. Say that I am not quite indifferent to you."

"I should not have listened to you so long if you had been indifferent to me, Captain Fanshaw," she replied. "I am a frank girl, and would have told you in a moment if I did not like you. I do like you — like you better than any one else. There! that must content you. If you were to plead for an hour, and more earnestly than you have done, I could give no other answer. I will make no promises. I cannot accept you."

"But why not, since you have owned that you do 'like' me, for I suppose you will not use a stronger word? Why not accept me? Must I renew all my protestations?"

"No," she replied. "I am fully satisfied of your sincerity. I am sure you do love me, and I believe we might be happy together. But before indulging any thought on the subject I must ascertain papa's wishes."

"If that is the only obstacle, dear Lucetta — don't be angry with me for calling you dear — I think it will be easily overcome. Now that I am secure of you, I feel easy as to the rest, for I am satisfied Sir Hugh Chetwynd cannot object to unite his daughter to the representative of a family as old and as wealthy as his own."

"Papa is a very singular personage, and I cannot possibly answer for him," said Lucetta.

"But he is not likely to interfere with your happiness, and when he learns that your affections are engaged, he will never object. Such is my impatience — a not unnatural impatience, Lucetta — that I can brook no delay. Only authorise me, and I will go to Old Court to-morrow, and make the proposal in due form. May I, Lucetta?"

"I don't know what to say," she replied, with some hesitation. "As I have just explained, papa is very odd, and I cannot tell how he may receive you."

"I must take my chance of that," said Captain Fanshaw, smiling. "I have no fear of this terrible papa. Mine is not a faint heart, fair lady."

"Do not let us stay here any longer," said Lucetta. "We are attracting attention, and many eyes are upon us. Take me to my aunt."

They both then arose, and Rainald, glancing exultingly at his discomfited rivals as he passed them, and wearing a triumph in his countenance, conducted her to the next room.

Sitting down by her aunt, Lucetta told her in a low tone what had occurred, and Rainald, who had remained standing near them, bent down his lofty head, and added a few words by way of confirmation.

"I have your consent, I trust, dear Lady Danvers?" he said.

"Yes, you have mine, Captain Fanshaw," she replied, "since I find that Lucetta likes you. But my consent is nothing. You must have that of her father, Sir Hugh Chetwynd."

"I hope to obtain it to-morrow," he rejoined. "I may calculate on your influence."

"My influence is nothing," said Lady Danvers. "But be sure if I had any I would use it in your behalf."

Her ladyship wandered a little from the truth here, for her influence would have been exerted for

March Ripley, if it had been used at all. However, she sided with the winner.

Lady Danvers and her niece did not remain much longer at the ball. The secret quickly transpired, and furnished the general topic of discourse, Captain Fanshaw being looked upon as the most fortunate of men.

As Lucetta took leave of Mrs. Dormer, that amiable lady gave her a significant smile, the meaning of which it was easy to interpret; but Mr. Courcy Dormer spoke out plainly enough, and, while assisting her to her shawl, offered her his congratulations. Captain Fanshaw attended the two ladies to their carriage, and, bidding Lucetta adieu, told her that she would not see him again till he had obtained Sir Hugh's consent.

"You mustn't be too sanguine," she murmured. "I will write to papa, but I do not know what the effect my letter will produce."

"It can only produce one effect," replied Rainald. "Had he the flinty heart which parents are supposed to possess, it must melt it."

"I will write to him too," said Lady Danvers; "though I fear my letter will do little good."

"Thus reinforced, success is certain," cried Rainald. "Adieu!"

Re-entering the house, Captain Fanshaw repaired to the card-room, where he found Mr. Courcy Dormer and a knot of young fellows talking and laughing

together, and he at once understood, from their looks when he appeared, that he had been the subject of their discourse. He had to stand a little raillery from his host, who insisted upon taking a glass of champagne with him, and would fain have prevailed on him to remain for the supper; but the party had no longer any attraction for Rainald, and as soon as he could escape, he took refuge in his brougham, and drove to the barracks.

But though robbed of its brightest ornament, the ball continued with unabated spirit, and was kept up to a late hour. The supper was wonderful, abounding in delicacies such as only could be found in that hospitable house. Everything was so remarkably good, that Cornet Colwich observed to one of his brother-officers as they washed down some slices of Montanches ham with a bumper of superlative cabinet Johannisberg, "What a fool Fanshaw must be to go away so soon. I wouldn't give up such a supper as this for the prettiest girl in Christendom."

III.

Osbert Leigh.

ONE day, while his charming daughter was in Brighton, creating the sensation we have described, Sir Hugh Chetwynd, who very rarely went beyond his own domains, rode out to call on his old friend Norton Mainwaring, who lived at a pretty little village named Ridgmount, about six miles from Old Court. Sir Hugh was wholly unattended, for he could not bear to be followed by a groom, and, preferring solitude, he left the high road, and pursued a secluded lane which led to Ridgmount, though rather in a roundabout way. A great change had taken place in the baronet's personal appearance. Twenty years had done the work of forty with him, and he now looked an old man. His cheeks were sunken, the hue of his skin was pallid, his brow deeply furrowed by wrinkles, while crows' feet had gathered thickly round the corners of his eyes, which, however, had lost little of their lustre. His wasted features still retained their striking outline, and his figure was unbent. Being so erect and thin he looked taller than before.

In his dark grey riding-coat, his boots of supple leather drawn above the knee, and his broad-leaved

soft felt hat, Sir Hugh wanted only a long laced cravat to make him look like a horseman of the time of William III. His habiliments suited him, especially his broad-leaved hat, which added to the sombre character of his physiognomy.

The day was clear and frosty, and the air keen and exhilarating, and to a younger man, with a breast devoid of care, a solitary ride on such a morning and through such a district would have been delightful. But Sir Hugh's heart was as utterly seared as the red leaves trodden beneath his horse's feet, and he was incapable of any joyous emotion. Nature had not entirely lost her charm for him, but he viewed all things through a darkened glass. Occasionally he might rouse himself, but he soon relapsed into his wonted gloomy train of thought. He returned the respectful salutations of the few country-folk he met, but did not stop to converse with any of them, neither did he remark the glances they threw after him. From his strange mood of life, his grim looks, and tall gaunt figure, Sir Hugh inspired a superstitious terror throughout the neighbourhood, and some people accounted it ill luck to meet him.

After riding for a few miles along the devious lane bordered by thick copses and woods abounding with pheasants, Sir Hugh reached the summit of a hill, whence a fine view was obtained of Old Court, and he drew in the rein for a moment to look at the place.

There on the side of the opposite hill, stood his ancestral mansion, presenting a most venerable and striking appearance in the midst of its rook-haunted groves. Close to the hall was a reverend little edifice, still in exquisite preservation. In the chancel of this little fane was an alabaster effigy of the founder of his family, and in its vaults reposed all his line, including his ill-fated brother. Even though reft of their foliage, the groves looked beautiful, and a portion of the garden was screened by an immense holly hedge, which looked vividly green from its contrast with the other leafless trees. Wide sweeping glades led down to the valley, where was a lake, the banks of which were extremely picturesque in places, owing to the timber that fringed them.

The winter sun shone brightly upon the many glittering vanes and gables of the old house, and upon its great mullioned windows, upon its grey lichen-covered walls, upon its terraces and gardens, upon the reverend fane beside it, upon the stately groves of the park revealing the deer in the coverts, though scarcely to be distinguished from the dry red fern amidst which they couched — it gleamed upon the frozen lake in the valley, and upon its picturesque and broken banks, but, despite the bright sunshine which called out its beauties, the prospect had a cold and melancholy look — at least, it had so in the eyes of Sir Hugh.

Everything awakened melancholy recollections,

all he beheld being associated with days of happiness now for ever gone by. Years ago that old house had been the scene of profuse hospitality — its chambers full of guests — its halls echoing with merriment — its tables groaning with good cheer. Where were the guests now? The halls were deserted, and the chambers peopled only by the ghost of those who had quitted them for ever. Where was she who might have made that house and those gardens an Eden to him? Her fate was a mystery, but he doubted not that she had long since passed from the land of the living. But did her child yet live? That thought constantly troubled him. Had he not solemnly vowed that that child should inherit his property — should possess Old Court — and could he break his vow? Where was she whom he had taken to his breast, and had loved only when about to lose her? In the vaults, where he, too, should soon be laid. All were gone — all, save his daughter, and she, too, might leave him. Thus his mental gloom over-shadowed all he beheld, and darkened the smiling prospect. Turning away moodier than ever, he pursued his course.

For some days a sharp frost had prevailed, and in places the road was covered with ice, rendering travelling dangerous. But Sir Hugh's horse was steady and sure-footed, and being roughed, got on very well, until while descending the hill he slipped, and, being unable to recover himself, fell, throwing

his rider. Sir Hugh, who was not as active as he had once been, lay for a few moments on the ground, when he was raised by a young man, who, after setting him on his feet and giving him his hat, inquired anxiously if he was hurt.

"No; only a little shaken," replied the baronet. "I thank you very much, sir, for your assistance."

The young man then brought the horse, who, long ere this, had regained his legs, and stood quietly enough near the spot where the accident had occurred, and Sir Hugh was preparing to mount him, when he noticed the young man's face for the first time, and almost started with surprise.

The individual on whom he gazed was about one-and-twenty, perhaps not quite so much, tall, well-proportioned, with singularly handsome features, slightly embrowned, but glowing with health, clear blue eyes, and brown locks. His bearing was manly, and the expression of his countenance agreeable and intelligent. Modern costume does not indicate with any exactitude the social position of the wearer, and the grey Tweed jacket, stout boots, and Newmarket hat which the young man had on, might belong to any rank. But be his position what it might, he was evidently one of nature's gentlemen. It was not, however, his good looks that attracted Sir Hugh's attention, but a remarkable resemblance to his ill-fated brother, which the baronet fancied he discerned in him. Sir Hugh looked so very hard at the young

man, that if the latter had been of a nervous temperament, he must have been embarrassed. Not being nervous, he bore the scrutiny firmly, and said, with a smile:

"You fancy you have seen me before, sir, but you have not."

"Your name?" cried Sir Hugh, quickly.

"I might refuse to tell you, questioned so abruptly," replied the young man. "But I will answer. My name is Osbert Leigh. I am quite unknown to you, Sir Hugh; and, in fact, I am a stranger to the neighbourhood."

"A stranger! How do you happen to be acquainted with me, then?" demanded Sir Hugh.

"Because I have heard you described, and so accurately, that I at once recognised you," replied the young man, smiling.

"Of course Osbert Leigh is your name? I am bound to believe you when you tell me so."

"Believe me or not, as you please, Sir Hugh," rejoined the young man, looking offended. "I care not."

And he turned to move away.

"Stop!" cried the baronet. "I have not done with you. Excuse my abruptness — it is mere manner. I am interested about you."

"I cannot see why you should be interested in me, Sir Hugh," replied the young man.

"How old are you?" demanded Sir Hugh, without noticing the remark.

"Not quite twenty-one," replied Osbert, showing by his manner that he did not like to be thus catechised.

"The age tallies exactly!" thought Sir Hugh. "Is your mother alive?"

"No," replied Osbert Leigh, gravely. "She died many years ago, as I have heard — when I was an infant."

"And your father?" demanded Sir Hugh, with some hesitation. "Does he still live?"

"I can give you no positive information respecting him," replied Osbert Leigh. "But I believe he is likewise dead."

"Young man," said Sir Hugh, "all you tell me increases the interest I felt in you the moment I looked upon your face. You must give me full particulars respecting your mother — who she was, where she died, and where she is buried. It is important to you — highly important — to furnish me with these particulars."

"Your manner convinces me you are in earnest, Sir Hugh," said Osbert Leigh. "I am therefore sorry that I cannot satisfy your curiosity. I know nothing whatever of my family beyond what I have told you. My mother, as I believe, died during my infancy, but where she died, what was her maiden name, and what her married name, I have never been able to ascertain. An old woman who represented herself as a nurse to my mother, took charge

of me, and she, too, died without communicating any particulars, so that all clue to my birth has been lost. I owe my nurture — my education — all I have, to the bounty of the best and kindest of men, Mr. Peter Leycester, of Monk's Heath Hall, in Cheshire. My story is soon told. Old Margaret Leigh, the nurse who took charge of me after my poor mother's death, and who gave me the name I bear — not my rightful one, I presume — was a Cheshire woman, and returned, after a long absence, to her native village of Prestbury. She had sufficient means to live decently, and took a small cottage, in which she dwelt, and where my earliest years were spent. This cottage belonged to Mr. Leycester, the excellent gentleman I have mentioned. He took a fancy to me as a boy, and often (as I have heard since) questioned old Margaret about me. But she was a reserved woman, and would neither let him nor any one else into her secrets. Unluckily, they died with her, for she was seized with paralysis, and remained speechless to the last. As I have stated, she had some little means, and upwards of three hundred pounds was found in one of her boxes, but this sum was taken possession of by her brother Randal, who declined to burden himself with me, and I know not what might have become of me, had not Providence raised me up a protector in Mr. Leycester. By him I have been brought up, and by his instrumentality I received an excellent education at the Free Gram-

mar School at Macclesfield. Had I been so inclined, he would have put me out to business in one of the large manufacturing towns in Lancashire, but I have no taste for commeree. For the last two or three years Mr. Leycester has found me employment upon his property, and I should have succeeded his steward, John Frodsham, who is getting old, but, to confess the truth, I got tired of this kind of life, and resolved to seek my fortune in Australia. On being informed of my design, Mr. Leycester endeavoured to dissuade me from it, but I remained firm; and when I explained my motives, he agreed that perhaps the plan might be for the best. He further offered to pay my passage, but as I had saved enough for that purpose, I did not require to trespass further upon his liberality. Now you know my whole history, Sir Hugh."

For some moments the baronet remained lost in reflection. He then said:

"You have not told me how you chance to be here. I hope I may infer from the circumstance that you have abandoned your intention of emigrating to Australia?"

"No, Sir Hugh, I hold steadily to my purpose. Australia, I feel certain, will suit me better than this country. I have aspirations which I cannot realise here. I am too proud and independent to submit to the drudgery required to work my way up to a good position. I hope to come back in a few

years with sufficient to enable me to live like a gentleman. I may not find a nugget, but I may make money in some other way."

"Well, I admire your spirit," said Sir Hugh. "But what brings you here?"

"I came here to visit an old gentleman whom I saw at Monk's Heath Hall a short time ago, while he was staying there with Mr. Leycester, and who kindly invited me to pass a week with him before I left England. The old gentleman in question is a friend of yours, Sir Hugh. I have heard him speak of you; and, indeed, it was he who described you to me. It is Mr. Mainwaring of Ridgmount."

"This is strange," cried Sir Hugh. "Mr. Mainwaring is a very old friend of mine — one of the few friends I care to retain. I am on my way to call on him now. It is a singular chance that has brought you to this neighbourhood, and still more singular that we should meet in this manner. There is more than mere accident in it."

"I am at a loss to understand your meaning, Sir Hugh," observed Osbert.

"I will explain myself more fully at another time," said Sir Hugh. "You must be my guest for a few days at Old Court. Nay, I will take no refusal."

"But it is not in my power to profit by your hospitality, Sir Hugh. My passage is taken in the *Wellesley*, which sails for Melbourne next week."

"Forfeit your passage-money, and if you should

eventually decide upon going to Melbourne, I will make good the loss. But it is absolutely necessary that you should remain with me for a short time, till I can make inquiries."

"You take me so much by surprise by this proposal, Sir Hugh, that I scarcely know what answer to make. But having fixed my plans, I do not like to change them. No, no. I shall go. All thanks to you for your kind invitation and offer, but I must decline them. I shall sail for Melbourne on Wednesday next."

"You shall not, I tell you!" cried Sir Hugh, peremptorily. "What can it matter whether you sail next week or six months hence? You shall come and stay with me."

"It matters little when I sail, certainly," rejoined Osbert. "But I do not choose to be interfered with. Once more, I thank you for your invitation, and beg to decline it."

"You are a fool. But I won't allow you to throw yourself away in this stupid manner."

"Sir Hugh, I have yet to learn by what right you assume this authority over me. I allow no man to control my actions."

"If only from his confounded obstinacy, I should feel certain he is Clarence's son," thought Sir Hugh. "Harkye, young sir," he added aloud. "Have you no desire to learn the secret of your birth? Do you think you can discover it by going to Melbourne?"

"If there is any chance of making the discovery I will readily stay," replied Osbert. "But I have no such expectation. Mr. Leycester has made all possible inquiries for me, but without success."

"But I have a clue which Mr. Leycester does not possess," said Sir Hugh. "Remain with me till it can be followed up. If I should be unsuccessful, you can prosecute your design."

"Nothing can be handsomer or more obliging than your offer, Sir Hugh, and I gratefully accept it. It is the dearest wish of my life to penetrate the mystery enshrouding my birth, and if you can accomplish this grand object, I shall be for ever beholden to you."

"Then the matter is arranged. Come to Old Court to-morrow. You will have your own room, and will be quite at home. I will now ride on to Ridgmount, and ask Mr. Mainwaring to accompany you."

So saying, and with the young man's aid, he mounted his horse, and rode off towards Ridgmount. After proceeding about a hundred yards, he looked back and saw Osbert standing where he had left him, reflecting, most likely, upon the singularity of the occurrence.

"Not a doubt he is Clarence's son," cried Sir Hugh. "My vow made to Amice binds me to find out the truth, and to act when I have found it out."

IV.

A Poor Gentleman.

MR. NORTON MAINWARING was a poor gentleman — a very poor gentleman indeed — and perhaps there is no part in the great social drama more difficult to sustain with credit than that which circumstances compelled this poor gentleman to play. Though most assuredly he felt his poverty, he gave no outward manifestation that he did so. You never heard him repine, and he never appeared discontented. What was the actual amount of the poor gentleman's income we cannot precisely determine, but though ridiculously small, it was sufficient for his wants; and if he had barely a hundred a year, as some folks asserted, it was quite wonderful what he did with it. He was always very neatly dressed, though in a bygone style of some forty years ago, when he was one of the leaders of fashion, and used to be seen in the great bay-window in St. James's-street; wore a well-brushed beaver, turned up at the sides, and looking as old-fashioned as his coat; a stiffly-starched coloured choker, with rounded gills, coming half way up his cheek; a buff waistcoat with brass buttons, very tight pantaloons, a thick watch-chain with heavy seals dangling from his fob, and

wonderfully polished boots. He was tall, but stooped a little, and had a complexion as red as a turkey-cock's wattles, the result probably of the immense quantity of old port which he had imbibed in his earlier days. Now he rarely touched wine at all, for the simple but sufficient reason that he could not afford to drink it. Mr. Mainwaring's features were good, though rather coarse; he had bleary eyes, a large nose, great fleshy lips, and ears which were as scarlet as his cheeks. He was always scrupulously shaved, for he abominated the modern fashion of beards, and his silvery hair was cropped close to the head.

Mr. Mainwaring dwelt in a pretty little cottage in the outskirts of the pretty little village of Ridgmount, close to the parsonage and the church, and not very far from the Chetwynd Arms. His little domicile was comfortably furnished, and he was very well waited upon by an old man-servant, Peter Lightfoot, who had lived with him in his better days, and still more carefully attended to by Peter Lightfoot's wife. Mrs. Lightfoot was a good deal younger than her spouse, and made a most excellent housekeeper, and it was no doubt mainly owing to her management that Mr. Mainwaring lived so well and so economically. His little parlour was as tidy and well kept as any old bachelor's parlour need be, and his little dining-room a perfect snugger. All things considered, as he was of a very contented disposi-

tion, our poor gentleman was rather to be envied than pitied. He was blessed with good health, had no cares, and no children or near relations to worry him.

Born seven or eight years before the present century commenced, Mr. Norton Mainwaring belonged to a good old Cheshire family. He was a younger son, but had a fortune left him by an uncle. Unluckily, he spent it, for in his younger days our poor gentleman was extravagant. He was a remarkably good coachman, belonged to the Four-in-Hand Club, and horsed the Tally-ho between London and Oxford. He was also fond of racing, and, being a good judge of horseflesh, won some money on the turf, but lost it all when railways knocked stage-coaches off the road. For some years he was greatly embarrassed, but he righted himself in the end, and prudently withdrew with the little he could save from the wreck of his fortune to his present asylum. He was an old friend of the Chetwynds, and had visited at Old Court in Sir Christopher's time, when Sir Hugh was young, and it was Sir Hugh who had recommended him to settle at Ridgmount, and, in fact, had presented him with the cottage — the gift being managed with such delicacy as not to offend the poor gentleman's pride. Norton Mainwaring had been a friend of Clarence Chetwynd as well as of the elder brother; in fact, he was more intimate with the former than the latter, and, in spite of his faults, liked him the better of the two, and he had

been generally employed by the baronet in getting that scapegrace out of his many difficulties. All this was over now. Clarence was in his bloody grave, and Mainwaring knew nothing of the dark secret connected with him, but believed, as everybody else believed, that he had been foully murdered by robbers. Of late years, also, he had formed a very different estimate of Sir Hugh's character, and though he stood in considerable awe of the moody baronet, he sincerely respected him.

As Sir Hugh rode up to the cottage, old Peter Lightfoot, who had descried him, came forth, and, by the baronet's directions, took his horse to the Chetwynd Arms. Sir Hugh was received at the open door by the buxom Mrs. Lightfoot, who told him that her master was nursing himself, having got a slight cold, "though I don't think there is much the matter with him, Sir Hugh," she added, with a smile.

"You have got a visitor, I find, Mrs. Lightfoot," remarked Sir Hugh. "I have just met him. Mr. Osbert Leigh — ha?"

"Yes, that's his name, Sir Hugh," replied Mrs. Lightfoot, "and a very nice young gentleman he is. We can't accommodate him here, of course, so we've got him a bed at the Chetwynd Arms. My master met him in Cheshire. And pray how is dear Miss Chetwynd, Sir Hugh? I hope we shall have her back soon. We miss her sadly."

"She is still at Brighton with her aunt," replied Sir Hugh, "and thinks of nothing but balls and musical parties."

"Very natural, at her age, Sir Hugh. What else should she think of?"

"I don't know what else women do think of, now-a-days," said Sir Hugh, gruffly.

Not daring to make any response, Mrs. Lightfoot opened a door, and displayed her old master seated in an easy-chair beside a cheerful fire, deeply engaged in the *Times*. A large brindled cat slumbered on the hearth-rug at his feet, and the whole room looked excessively snug. Mr. Mainwaring being rather deaf, and his back being towards the door, he was not aware of his friend's arrival till Mrs. Lightfoot went up and announced Sir Hugh.

"Eh! what?" he cried, starting up, and hurriedly taking off his gold eye-glasses. "Sir Hugh here — Lord bless me! Ah! my worthy friend, how glad I am to see you!" shaking him heartily by the hand as he spoke. "Take a seat — pray take a seat near the fire."

Sir Hugh complied, and Mrs. Lightfoot quitted the room, leaving them alone together. After a little conversation on general topics, Sir Hugh broached the subject uppermost in his mind, and said, "By-the-by, Mainwaring, I must mention a circumstance which occurred to me just now. While I was on my way hither, a slight accident that befel my horse

made me acquainted with a young man who is staying with you, as I understand."

"Osbert Leigh! Bless my soul and body! — have you seen him? My stars! that is strange. And pray what do you think of him, Sir Hugh?" he said, inquiringly.

"I think him tolerably good looking," replied the other, with affected indifference.

"That's not what I mean. I want to know whom do you think he resembles? Do you discern a likeness to any one you have known, eh?"

"Undoubtedly I was struck with the resemblance he bears to ——"

"To your poor brother Clarence," supplied Mainwaring. "The likeness is extraordinary. I was struck with it the instant I beheld him, and it was his likeness to the poor dear fellow who's gone that made me take such a fancy to the lad, that, although I have never had a guest under my roof since I came to reside here, I invited him to visit me. You know how I loved Clarence, Sir Hugh, and it is natural I should feel an interest in a young man whom I believe to be his son. Not that I ever heard that Clarence had a son, but he was a gay fellow, as you know — a gay fellow — ha! ha! And there is a certain mystery about this Osbert Leigh, as he calls himself, which strengthens the presumption. He is quite in the dark as to his actual parentage."

"So he told me," remarked Sir Hugh.

"Aha! my friend, you have been questioning him, I perceive," chuckled Mainwaring.

"I know all his history," rejoined the baronet. "And you really think he is Clarence's son?"

"I could almost swear it. He's as like what Clarence was at his age, as one pea is to another."

"You have not mentioned your suspicions to the young man, I trust, Mainwaring?" said Sir Hugh, uneasily.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the other. "I must confess, however, that I thought of taking him to Old Court, but I didn't know how you might like it."

"Bring him over to-morrow, Mainwaring. I have invited him to stay with me, and have prevailed upon him to give up his projected voyage to Melbourne."

"The deuce you have!" cried Mainwaring. "Then perhaps you intend doing something for him?"

"That depends. I shall institute inquiries about him, and if he should turn out what we suppose him, I *will* do something for him."

"Just like you, Sir Hugh — just like you. You are the soul of generosity, as I know from personal experience. It would be a thousand pities that such a fine young fellow should go to those infernal diggings."

"He shall not need to go, if our surmises in regard to him prove correct," rejoined Sir Hugh.

"But I must be fully satisfied on that score. The investigation will be difficult, and I shall be glad of your assistance in making it, for I can trust you in the matter."

"I will assist you with all my heart, Sir Hugh. As to my discretion, I will say nothing. It is not the first time you have trusted me."

"No, you have done much for me, my good friend. But the utmost caution must be observed with the young man till I am in a position to reveal the truth to him, should it be discovered. It would be cruel to awaken hopes that may never be realised."

"Very true — very true. Have you any clue to guide you in your inquiries, Sir Hugh, may I ask?"

"A slight clue, but I fear it won't conduct me far. However, we shall see. To-morrow, you will bring him to me as arranged, and as soon as he is established at Old Court, you and I will commence the investigation. I will send the carriage for you. And now let Lightfoot fetch my horse."

While Lightfoot went on his errand, Mainwaring made many inquiries about Lucetta, who was a great favourite with him, and seemed delighted to learn that she was enjoying herself so much at Brighton.

"I am quite sure she will turn all the young men's heads," remarked the old gentleman, laughing.

"It will be lucky if her own is not turned as well," remarked Sir Hugh, testily. "I am sorry I trusted her with Lady Danvers. The girl will be quite spoiled."

"Not she!" cried Mainwaring. "Lucetta cannot be spoiled."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Sir Hugh. "I fear she is spoiled already. Ever since he has been at Brighton she has been engaged in one incessant round of gaiety. I was going to order her back, but since this young fellow is coming to me, I shall let her remain a little longer with her aunt."

"By all means let her finish the season at Brighton, my good friend. A little gaiety will do her good."

"A little gaiety!" echoed Sir Hugh. "I tell you she is out every night. Her letters speak of nothing but concerts, and dinners, and balls. I am sick to death of it."

"Do you mean to take her to town in the spring, Sir Hugh?"

"Take her to town! No. When she comes back she must be quiet."

"A pleasant prospect for a lively girl," thought the old gentleman. "But I would take long odds that she *does* go to town."

Soon after this Lightfoot appeared with the horse, and Sir Hugh, having taken leave of his old friend, rode back to Old Court.

V.

The Visit to Old Court.

NEXT morning, as arranged, the carriage came over to Ridgmount, and Mr. Mainwaring and his young friend were driven to Old Court.

It was with emotions for which he could in no way account that Osbert approached the antique mansion. As the carriage entered the park, and pursued a winding road that led past the lake, now a vast sheet of ice, through a woody glen, and then gradually mounted the hill on which the old mansion was built, Mr. Mainwaring pointed out the most beautiful portions of the sylvan domain to his companion, whose quick eye, ranging over the prospect, had already taken in its charms. But when they passed through the old gateway, and the picturesque old structure stood right in front, Osbert gave full vent to his admiration.

Old Jodrell, who still remained with Sir Hugh, though he had become very infirm, being a martyr to gout, hobbled out of the porch with a younger footman, and respectfully saluting Mr. Mainwaring, who good humouredly inquired after his health, ushered them into the entrance-hall, which was of great size, panelled with oak, and adorned with

several suits of armour of different epochs, shields, spears, and swords. In the centre was a large carved oak table. Doors on either hand communicated with different rooms, while a grand oak staircase, ornamented with posts sustaining the carved escutcheons of the family, led to a gallery above.

On setting foot in the hall, Osbert stood still and gazed around, deeply impressed by what he beheld. As he remained in this attitude, old Jodrell, who was talking to Mr. Mainwaring, chanced to notice him, and stared at him as if he beheld a ghost.

"Do you perceive a likeness in my young friend to anybody you have seen?" inquired Mainwaring, in a low voice.

"Do I?" ejaculated the old butler. "Good gracious, sir! why he's the exact image of ——"

"Hush!" interrupted Mainwaring. "Be cautious, Jodrell. No remarks on the subject, if you wouldn't offend Sir Hugh."

"Never fear me, sir," rejoined the old butler. "I know my master's ways. We shall hear what Mrs. Mansfield says presently. Sir Hugh is in the library. I'll take you to him."

Just as he spoke, the library door opened, and Sir Hugh came forth, and welcomed his guests. Expressing in very kindly terms his pleasure at seeing Osbert, he desired the footman to show the young gentleman to his room, and while Osbert, preceding by his nimble attendant, mounted the

noble staircase, Sir Hugh took Mainwaring into the library.

Osbert was shown into a large antiquated bed-chamber, with windows looking upon the garden, and commanding a side-view of the venerable little church amid the trees. In the room was a great old walnut bedstead, with twisted posts as black as ebony, a large canopy, and stiff curtains. The walls were covered with grim old tapestry, which added to the sombre character of the apartment. Over the mantelpiece, which was dark walnut, like the bed, there was the portrait of a beautiful but very delicate-looking woman, with an infant on her lap. This was Lady Chetwynd, and had been painted only a week before her death. It was a picture full of touching sentiment, and Osbert had heard enough of Sir Hugh's family from Mr. Mainwaring to guess whom it represented. But this was not the only picture that attracted his attention. In another part of the room there was a portrait in which the same features seemed to be represented, but far younger and more blooming. On examining the latter picture more carefully, Osbert perceived that it was of much more recent date than the one first looked at, and he soon found out that it had not been long painted. He came, therefore, to the conclusion that it must represent Sir Hugh's daughter Lucetta, whose beauty he had heard extolled by Mr. Mainwaring. The artist had evidently been inspired by his subject,

and had caught all Lucetta's grace and vivacity. Osbert took up a position favourable for examining this charming portrait, and then sat down to contemplate it at his leisure. The eyes seemed to fascinate him, and the longer he looked at them the more powerful became the influence, until he ended by becoming half enamoured.

At last he arose, exclaiming, "What a fool I am to be enthralled in this way! Why should I think of this beautiful creature? She is not for me."

On quitting the room, he found the old butler and Mrs. Mansfield in the corridor. The latter curtseyed to him respectfully as he passed, and exchanged a significant look with Jodrell.

Being informed that Sir Hugh and Mr. Mainwaring had gone out into the garden, Osbert repaired to the library, where he was afterwards joined by Mainwaring, who brought Sir Hugh's excuses, stating that the baronet did not feel equal to society that day, and had deputed him to play the host. With this apology Osbert was fain to be content.

The day passed pleasantly enough. Mainwaring and the young man dined together in an immense room hung round with family portraits ranging over three centuries, which Osbert regarded with admiration akin to awe.

The dinner was excellent, and Mr. Jodrell most attentive. After dinner he produced a bottle of Sir

Christopher's port, which Mr. Mainwaring pronounced perfect. A few glasses rendered him very chatty, and he talked in rapturous terms of Lucetta's beauty. Osbert listened to her praises with newly awakened interest. But though in a very communicative mood, the old gentleman forbore to allude to Clarence Chetwynd, and carefully avoided that subject.

When they separated for the night, Mainwaring said to his young friend, "By-the-by, Osbert, you won't see me to-morrow. I am going to Maidstone with Sir Hugh on business — on very particular business, my boy. Possibly we shan't be back till late on the following day, but you will have the whole place to yourself — the garden — the park — and the church — and old Jodrell will take good care of you."

"Oh! I shall do very well," replied the young man. "Don't mind me. Good night!"

Before seeking his stately couch, Osbert gazed at the picture of the young girl, and a vision of beauty haunted his dreams.

VI.

Introduces Mr. Vandeleur la Hogue.

SIR HUGH, as we have seen, received Osbert on his arrival with great courtesy and kindness, but shunned him throughout the day, leaving him entirely to the care of Mainwaring. Alone in his library, and occupied by distracting reflections, unable to reconcile the difficulties that presented themselves to him, the baronet began deeply to regret that accident had made him acquainted with his nephew, of whose very existence up to the moment of their meeting he had been ignorant. He also reproached himself, that without due consideration of the consequences that might flow from the step, he had invited the young man to his house.

Yet in their apparently accidental meeting he recognised the hand of Fate.

But why pursue the inquiry further? Why not let the matter rest where it was? Osbert had failed to discover the secret of his birth, and most likely would never discover it. And if he did, what matter? He could know nothing of the Oath by which Sir Hugh felt bound, and could never demand its fulfilment.

These considerations, however, weighed not with

Sir Hugh. By no process of reasoning could he shake the conviction that had forced itself upon him that Osbert was Clarence's son, and that Amice was his mother. But this point must be established. Proof obtained, he was bound to act, regardless of consequences.

Reflections such as these occupied him throughout the day, and throughout the painful vigils of the night; for during the night that succeeded Osbert's arrival the unhappy man did not attempt to press his pillow. Governed by a high and fantastic notion of honour — the slave of his word — burdened by a sense of guilt, which, though imaginary, was real to him, and which years of deep and bitter regret had not sufficed to shake off — it is not marvellous that in the end his sense of duty should outweigh his strong affection for his daughter, and that he should resolve, in the event of his impressions being confirmed, that no consideration of her interests should prevent the fulfilment of his Vow. This conclusion arrived at, after the long and fierce struggle which we have described as agitating his breast, he became comparatively calm.

Since he did not go to bed at all, he was ready betimes in the morning, and causing Mainwaring to be called at a much earlier hour than was agreeable to that easy-going old gentleman, whose slumbers had been undisturbed by any painful thoughts, set off with him in the carriage for Aylesford.

A twelve miles drive was before them, through an extremely beautiful part of Kent. But though affording constant fine views of richly wooded districts, and passing many splendid mansions, the road was hilly, and consequently the carriage did not make very rapid progress, so that more than two hours elapsed before they came in sight of the little town of Aylesford, with its ancient bridge across the Medway, its habitations intermingled with trees, and its picturesquely situated old church.

The morning was sharp and frosty, and though Mainwaring had his great-coat closely buttoned, a shawl wrapped round his throat, and though his hands were protected by warm gloves, he suffered terribly from the cold. His feet were like lumps of ice, and his long nose looked frostbitten. Moreover, he felt heartily tired of his moody companion, who, leaning back in the carriage, with his broad hat pulled over his brows, had scarcely spoken a word during the whole of the long, tedious drive.

"Thank Heaven, here we are at last!" exclaimed the old gentleman, clapping his hands together to restore the circulation. "Here's Aylesford, Sir Hugh."

Roused from the sombre reverie in which he was plunged, the baronet let down the carriage window and looked out, and as his eye alighted on the old church on the eminence, such painful recollections

were excited in his breast that he quickly drew back again.

"I'm deuced glad we're at the end of our journey," remarked Mr. Mainwaring. "My extremities are absolutely frozen, and I seem to have lost all feeling in my hands and feet. How delightful to thaw oneself before a good fire. You don't appear to suffer from cold as much as I do, Sir Hugh."

"I don't feel the cold," rejoined the baronet.

"Gad, that's strange! I shan't feel thoroughly warm till I've breakfasted. Travelling on an empty stomach — especially on a frosty morning like this — doesn't suit me. Do you mean to drive to the Bell, Sir Hugh?"

"No, to the station."

"To the station!" exclaimed Mainwaring. "Zounds! you're not going farther, surely?"

"Don't be alarmed, my good friend. We are going no farther at present. But I shall alight at the station, because, in the prosecution of the inquiries I am about to make, I don't care to be attended by servants."

"I understand. You mean to drop our carpet-bags at the station, dismiss the carriage, and walk on to the Bell."

"Exactly. I have given orders to that effect to Drax."

In another minute they had reached the railway

station. The carriage door being opened by the footman, the two gentlemen stepped out; after which their carpet-bags were delivered to a porter, and taken by him to the cloak-room. Meanwhile, Sir Hugh told Drax, the coachman, not to put up at Aylesford, but at a village which he named, a few miles off on the way back, where there was a good inn; and having thus relieved himself of all domestic espionage, he set off with his old friend across the bridge, in the direction of the Bell, quite unconscious that his proceedings had been watched by a very sharp-eyed person inside the station, who, as soon as the baronet was gone, came forth and proceeded to interrogate Dick Pigot, the footman, before the latter could mount to the box.

"My friend," said this personage, removing a cigarette from his lips, "tell me. That is Sir Hugh Chetwynd who has just gone, ha?"

As the speaker had a slight foreign accent, and as his looks, manner, and attire seemed rather foreign, Dick Pigot at once set him down for a Frenchman. He had an imposing appearance, that stranger, being showily dressed. A French grey over-coat, sky-blue trousers fitting tightly to a pair of lean legs, a Parisian hat, Parisian boots, gloves, and gorgeous neckcloth, formed the salient features of his apparel. But, in spite of his fashionable attire, he did not look exactly like a gentleman. However, his consequential air proved that he en-

tertained no mean opinion of himself, and meant to assert his importance. He was by no means a young man, and somewhat short of stature, but his figure was slight and good. His features were prominent, and his brown shaven cheeks, thick moustache, and long imperial, gave a Napoleonic cast to his countenance — at least, so Dick Pigot thought, for the young man had often seen caricatures of the Emperor of the French in *Punch*.

Touching his hat respectfully, Dick Pigot answered the stranger's inquiry in the affirmative. It was Sir Hugh Chetwynd.

"I thought I could not be mistaken, though I have not seen him for many years. You are his servant, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," replied Pigot, rather flattered by the inquiry. "I have lived five years with Sir Hugh."

"So long!" exclaimed the stranger. "Sir Hugh knows when he has a good servant."

"It appears so, sir. Our coachman, Mr. Drax, has lived with him more than five-and-twenty years."

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed the stranger. "Then Mr. Drax must have known my friend, poor Captain Chetwynd?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied the coachman, who overheard the remark. "I knowed the captain well, and liked him too."

"Of course you did, Drax. Everybody liked

him," rejoined the stranger. "I dare say you have heard him speak of me — his particular friend — Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue?"

"Can't say as I have, sir," replied the coachman; "but then it's so long ago, I may have forgotten. Besides, the captain warn't much at Old Court during the latter part of his life. Sad end he came to, sir! I've bin a thinkin' of him all this blessed mornin', for you may be aware that it was at Kit's Coity House, on yonder hill-side, that he was barbarously murdered."

"I'm aware of it," rejoined Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue, emitting a thin stream of smoke from his mouth. "In fact, I feel so much interest in my poor friend's sad fate, that I have come hither for the express purpose of visiting the spot where he was killed. I was at Amsterdam at the time of the murder, and have not been in England since. But tell me, Drax," he added, with a singular look, "what became of the perpetrators of the dreadful deed? I hope they met the just reward of their crime."

"Not both, sir," replied the coachman. "One on 'em was drowned the same night in the Medway, just above the bridge. But the t'other, and worst, Neal Evesham, has never been heard of since. Whether the villain got transported, or quitted the country of his own accord, no one can tell."

"No doubt he has met with his deserts," said

Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue. "I think I must have seen the fellow. He was the captain's groom, eh? — was he not?"

"He was, sir; but not at the time of the murder. He had been discharged nearly a year before for dishonesty, and was stableman at the Bell, in this town. I always wondered the captain would employ such a scampish chap; but I suppose he found him useful in some way."

"If I recollect right, this Neal Evesham was a smart-looking fellow — eh?" remarked Mr. La Hogue.

"Smart enough, sir, when he was with the captain; but when he got down in the world he became as shabby-lookin' a rascal as ever you clapped eyes on. I should ha' bin ashamed to notice him."

"Such a poor devil was beneath your notice, Drax," said Mr. La Hogue, laughing. "Perhaps the world used him badly, and drove him to crime."

"Not a bit of it, sir. Neal was a reg'lar bad 'un, and no mistake. I only wish I could come across him; but there's little chance of that. If alive, he's too cunning to put himself in the way of a halter."

"Why, you would scarcely know him if you were to see him, Drax," said the other, keeping his keen eye on the coachman.

"Shouldn't I?" cried Drax. "He'd best not trust to that. I should know him again in an instant."

But such a rogue ain't worth so many words. Since you were a friend of the poor captain, sir, you may like to hear of a curious circumstance as has just happened. Yesterday Mr. Mainwaring, the old gentleman as you see just now with Sir Hugh, brought a young friend to Old Court——"

"Well, there's nothing very remarkable in that, Drax," said Mr. La Hogue, laughing.

"There's this remarkable about it, sir," replied the coachman. "The young gentleman is the exact image of Captain Chetwynd. Every one in the house, as recollects the captain, was struck with the likeness——old Mr. Jodrell, the butler, old Mrs. Mansfield, the housekeeper, and several other old servants, myself included. I never see sich a likeness i' my born days. So help me! I thought it was the poor captain come to life again."

"You surprise me. The young fellow must be his son."

"So we all on us say," rejoined Drax; "but then the captain were never married."

"He might have had a son, for all that," remarked Mr. La Hogue.

"Well, that's possible, sir. And I'll tell you more. There was a lady came to Old Court one night, about a week after the murder, and we all thought her in some way connected with the captain."

"Was her name Amice?" inquired Mr. La Hogue, with suddenly awakened curiosity.

"There I'm at fault, sir. She gave no name, but she was taken suddenly ill after her arrival at the Hall, and was obliged to be put to bed, and Mrs. Mansfield, who attended her, said she raved a good deal about the captain. But, poor soul! whoever she might be, she disappeared most mysteriously afore daybreak, and though every search was made for her about the park and neighbourhood — I myself assisted at it — she could not be found. Now, putting two and two together, might not this poor lady be the mother of the young gentleman who bears such an extraordinary resemblance to Captain Chetwynd? Mr. Jodrell and Mrs. Mansfield both think so."

"Faith, I think they're right," cried Mr. La Hogue. "You have strongly excited my curiosity, Drax. I must see this young gentleman. What does he call himself?"

"Osbert Leigh," replied the coachman. "He has been on a visit to Mr. Mainwaring, and, as I understand, comes from some place in Cheshire. I think Mrs. Lightfoot — she is Mr. Mainwaring's housekeeper, sir — told me the young gentleman is about to sail very shortly for Melbourne."

"To Melbourne!" exclaimed Mr. La Hogue. "I must see him without delay. Pray what brings Sir Hugh and Mr. Mainwaring to Aylesford this morning?"

"I ought not to answer the question if I could,

sir, but I can't," replied Drax, bluntly. "I know nothing about Sir Hugh's business."

"It relates to Mr. Osbert Leigh, I'm quite sure," remarked Mr. La Hogue.

"I think so too," interposed the footman, who had been listening attentively to the discourse.

"If it does, it's no business o' yourn, Dick Pigot," said the coachman, gruffly. "I advise you not to meddle with your master's consarns. Get up, and let's be off."

"Stop a minute, if you please, Drax," said Mr. La Hogue. "I particularly desire to see this young gentleman — this Osbert Leigh. I may be of service to him. Where is he?"

"At Old Court, sir," said Dick Pigot, who did not like being snubbed by the coachman, and was determined to show his independence. "There he will remain till Sir Hugh's return."

"And when will Sir Hugh return?" asked Mr. La Hogue.

"Quite uncertain, sir," returned Pigot. "Possibly not for a couple of days."

"Better say a week while you're about it, Dick," interposed the coachman.

"Sir Hugh is a widower, I believe, and has only one child — a daughter?" said Mr. La Hogue to Pigot.

"Quite correct, sir," rejoined the footman. "Miss Chetwynd is from home — staying with her aunt,

Lady Danvers, at Brighton. There's nobody at Old Court at present, except Mr. Osbert Leigh."

"When you've done, Pigot, I'll trouble you to get up," cried the coachman, "or I shall drive off without you."

"No you won't, Drax," said Mr. La Hogue, in a conciliatory tone. "You'll do me a good turn, I'm sure, especially when you yourself will be the gainer by it. I want particularly to see Mr. Osbert Leigh. Take me with you to Old Court."

To ensure compliance with the request, he drew forth a well-filled purse, and taking a couple of sovereigns from it, requested Pigot to give them to the coachman. An instantaneous effect was produced by the magic metal upon Drax. His surly features relaxed into a grin, and he called out, in a very bland voice, "Get in, sir."

"An instant, and I shall be ready, Drax," said Mr. La Hogue. "I must take my things with me."

"Allow me to fetch them, sir," said the obliging Dick Pigot, who perhaps expected a gratuity, since sovereigns were flying about.

Nor was the youth disappointed. Slipping a couple of pieces of gold into his hand, Mr. La Hogue gave him some directions; whereupon he hurried into the waiting-room of the station, and presently returned, bearing a smart valise, a flat leather box, a cloak, and umbrella. These were quickly placed

in the carriage, and Mr. La Hogue lost no time in following them.

"Don't smoke, if you please, sir," said Pigot, as he shut the door. "Sir Hugh dislikes the smell of tobacco."

"His prejudices shall be respected," rejoined Mr. La Hogue, throwing away his cigarette. "But I dare say you wouldn't object to a cigar, Pigot," he added, giving him a couple of fine regalias. "Smoke those outside. You can offend no one there."

Pigot received the gift with a smile, and presently propitiated Drax with one of the cigars.

While the horses were trotting briskly homewards — while the pair on the box were each enjoying a fragrant weed — Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue was snugly seated inside the carriage, in the very place recently occupied by Sir Hugh, with the windows closely shut to exclude the frosty air, and a mantle covering his knees, laughing to himself at the dexterous move he had made, which he felt assured would lead to most important consequences.

VII.

The Picture in the Closet.

SOME time before Osbert came down, Sir Hugh and Mainwaring had started for Aylesford. The young man, therefore, was left alone in the old mansion, and he might have been its lord and master from the respectful manner in which he was treated by Jodrell.

"Pray make yourself quite at home, sir," said the old butler to him. "Sir Hugh gave me strict orders to take care of you, and I don't mean to neglect them. After breakfast, if it meets with your approval, I'll take you over the house; and when you've examined it, if you would like a little shooting, one of our keepers shall attend you. The covers are well stocked with pheasants. Or if you prefer a ride, there are good hacks in the stable."

Thanking the old butler, Osbert told him he could amuse himself very well about the place, and didn't care either to ride or shoot.

An excellent and rather profuse breakfast was then set before him, and the young man did ample justice to the cold partridges, game pie, and other good things with which the assiduous butler served him. Jodrell remained in the room during the repast,

and stationed himself near the sideboard, and whenever Osbert glanced in that direction, he found the old man's eyes fixed upon him.

"Don't be offended if I look hard at you, sir," said Jodrell. "I can't help it."

"Oh! I'm not in the least offended," returned Osbert, laughing. "I'm glad you take so much interest in me."

"I *do* take an interest in you, sir — a very great interest — and not without reason," rejoined the old man.

Breakfast over, Osbert called upon the old butler to fulfil his promise of showing him over the house, and accordingly Jodrell took him through the spacious apartments on the ground floor. Osbert was charmed with these magnificent but sombre rooms, and while looking round at the black oak panels, at the furniture of the same material and the same hue, at the heavy curtains, he seemed to be carried back to a bygone age. The library, with its vast store of ancient tomes, especially delighted him. After carefully examining the long line of portraits of the Chetwynd family which embellished the gallery, he remarked to his attendant:

"I perceive a great resemblance to Sir Hugh in one of the earliest of these portraits, but I do not find any portrait of the baronet himself."

"There is none," replied Jodrell. "Sir Hugh would never be painted."

"That is a pity," remarked Osbert. "He has a striking countenance, and it ought to be preserved."

"So my lady told him, but he wouldn't sit, even to please her. You have remarked her portrait, no doubt, sir, and Miss Lucetta's, in your room."

"Yes. How beautiful Miss Chetwynd must be!" exclaimed the young man, rapturously.

"A lovely young lady indeed, sir," rejoined Jodrell. "She's in Brighton just now with her aunt, Lady Danvers, enjoying herself, I make no doubt, much more than she could do in this dull house. But we shall be very glad to have her back. One of these days I hope you may see her, sir."

Osbert echoed this wish.

"Talking of portraits, sir," pursued the butler, "there is one I should like to show you. It's the portrait of Sir Hugh's younger brother, Captain Chetwynd, who came to a very sad end, as you may, perhaps, have heard. He was murdered, near Aylesford, rather more than twenty years ago. It was a frightful affair, and Sir Hugh has never got over the shock which his brother's death occasioned him. He can't bear the least allusion to it — not even to hear the captain's name mentioned. The portrait has been put out of the way, but I know where to find it, and I'll show it you."

Osbert expressing a great desire to behold the portrait, the butler hobbled along the corridor as quickly as his gouty feet would permit him, and conducted the young man to Sir Hugh's dressing-room. In it there was a richly carved chestnut armoire, and while the young man was examining this fine piece of furniture, Jodrell opened a closet and brought out the portrait, rearing it against a table, so that when Osbert turned it stood full in his view. It was a half-length portrait, and painted by a skilful hand.

"Is that Captain Chetwynd?" inquired Osbert, whose looks betokened his astonishment.

"It is, sir," replied Jodrell; "and now you'll understand why I wished to show it to you, and why I couldn't take my eyes off you during breakfast. Look at it, sir. Allowing for the dress, which makes no great difference, it might be your own picture, sir — your own picture — and it was painted when the captain was about your age. There are the same blue eyes, the same complexion, the same straight nose, short upper lip, mouth, and chin. Hair also of the same colour, though the captain wore his hair longer than yours — but that was the fashion in his day. What do you think of it, sir?"

"Upon my word, I'm so astonished that I don't know what to think," replied Osbert. "I can't be

so unacquainted with my own features as not to perceive the likeness that picture bears to them."

"The likeness is amazing," said Jodrell. "I'll tell you what I think, sir. I think — nay, I firmly believe — that this is the portrait of your own father. It's not in nature that two people can be so much alike without being nearly related — that's what I go on."

"You may be right," rejoined Osbert; "for I have never yet been able to discover my father."

"Then here he is, sir," cried the butler, triumphantly. "I've found him for you."

"This likeness accounts for the strange interest that Sir Hugh took in me when I accidentally encountered him," said Osbert; "and was the motive, probably, that led him to invite me here."

"Sir Hugh must have been just as much struck by your likeness to his brother as I am," rejoined Jodrell, "and, unless I'm greatly mistaken, the errand on which he and Mr. Mainwaring are bound is to obtain proofs of your birth. It's my hope and belief that you'll soon be acknowledged as the captain's son, and Sir Hugh's nephew."

"I ask no brighter fortune!" cried Osbert. "But leave me for a moment, Jodrell. Surprise and joy almost overpower me."

Thus enjoined, the old butler left the room, shutting the door as he went forth.

"And this, then, is my father!" exclaimed Osbert, examining the portrait. "I do not doubt it. All things seem to confirm the supposition — Sir Hugh's conduct — the hints dropped by Mainwaring — this good old man's strong convictions. Nature, too, speaks in my breast. My own heart tells me it is the truth. But can my birth be established? It can — it will. I can have no doubts now. The clouds that have hung over me so long are rolling off. What a future rises before me!"

The longer he looked at the portrait, the more firmly convinced he became that he beheld his father. Proud thoughts and new-kindled desires filled his breast. He was no longer obscure. He was one of the ancient and haughty line whose portraits he had just been contemplating. That thought made his heart leap. He resolved to be worthy of his race.

When he came out, he found Jodrell waiting for him. The old butler noticed the proud expression of his countenance, and understood what it meant.

"Pray come with me to the housekeeper's room, sir," he observed. "Mrs. Mansfield has something to say to you."

Osbert willingly assented, whereupon they descended a staircase at the farther end of the gallery, which brought them to the housekeeper's room —

an old-fashioned apartment with a low ceiling, and a seat in the window. It contained more than one cupboard, and a large chest of drawers, and looked exceedingly comfortable. Over the chimney-piece hung a little portrait, which at once caught Osbert's attention. Mrs. Mansfield was arranging some things in one of the cupboards when they entered, but she immediately came out, and made a very respectful curtsy to Osbert.

Having shown our young friend into the room, Jodrell retired.

Begging her visitor to take a chair near the fire, and then apologising for the liberty, Mrs. Mansfield sat down beside him. The good dame looked so nice in her morning dress and cap, and her ancient features wore such a kindly expression, that Osbert could not fail to be pleased with her. After gazing earnestly and affectionately at him for a few moments, she exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, there can be no doubt about it. Your face proclaims you Clarence Chetwynd's son. Jodrell whispered to me before he left that you have just seen your father's portrait — for I won't hesitate to style him your father. Ah! my dear," she added, unable to repress her tenderness, "I was so fond of him, that the very sight of you melts my heart. While looking at you I could almost fancy I had got him back again. Often and often has he been in this room — often and often has he sat in

the very chair where you're now sitting. Oh! he was a gay, lively gentleman, was Clarence — quite free and easy — very different from Sir Hugh — and so handsome. Little did I think when he laughed so much what his mirth would end in! Little did I foresee his melancholy fate. Still less did I foresee that years after he was gone to his grave, his son — his undoubted son — would be sitting before me. Oh! my dear, you must excuse me, but the joy is almost too much for a poor old body like me. A gracious Providence has brought you back when you might have been lost for ever. You ought to feel grateful, my dear."

Osbert murmured that he did feel grateful — very grateful.

"And now, my dear, that you have discovered your father," pursued the good old dame, "I think I can tell you something about your mother."

And she proceeded to detail to him, with every minute particular, the strange visit of the beautiful and suffering lady, dwelling especially upon her mysterious disappearance.

"Now, my dear," she said, in concluding her narration, to which, as may be supposed, Osbert lent the deepest attention, "though I didn't dare to say so at the time to Sir Hugh, and though I've never ventured to mention the subject to him since, I feel quite certain, from some expressions that escaped the

poor lady during her delirium, that she was Clarence Chetwynd's wife, and I now feel equally certain she was your mother. You had not seen the light then, my dear, but the poor lady let me into her secret when she groaned and prayed to be spared till her child should be born. Heaven granted her prayer."

Here the old housekeeper ceased. Osbert made no remark, but covered his face to hide his emotion. He was roused at last by the good dame, who touched him gently on the shoulder, and, as he looked up, kissed him affectionately, saying,

"I can't help it. I must kiss Clarence's son."

Her looks were so full of maternal kindness, that Osbert felt he could love her like a mother.

"All you have told me," he said, "agrees with the little I know respecting my poor mother. That it was she whom you tended on that night seems clear — but whither she fled, and what became of her, remains a mystery."

"Heaven in its own time will clear up the darkness," rejoined the old dame. "Mark my words. The day is at hand when you will be recognised as a Chetwynd. You have not yet seen your cousin Lucetta. There she is," she added, pointing to the portrait over the mantelpiece. Is she not a dear, sweet, lovely creature? But, bless you! that picture doesn't do her justice — not it! I'll tell you what

I did, my dear. I hung her portrait in your room that you might see it."

"I did see it," cried Osbert, with a rapturous expression that did not escape the housekeeper.

"I hope she won't be snapped up by one of those fortune-hunters in Brighton," said the old dame. "I'm told she's greatly admired. I've got somebody else in my head for her now. Can't you guess whom I mean, my dear? I see you do, by your blushing. You'd just suit each other, and make such a charming young couple. I hope I may live to see the day!"

Osbert laughed, but the good dame's words found an echo in his breast.

"And now I must become serious once more," she said. "You have a duty to perform. Your poor father is buried in our little church."

"I will go there at once," he cried.

"I felt quite sure you would, my dear. Jodrell will go with you, and show you the vaults."

She then rang a bell, which was answered by the butler in person, and on learning Osbert's wishes, which entirely accorded with his own notions of propriety, he went for the keys, and having provided himself at the same time with a lantern, conducted the young man to the church.

The ancient and beautiful little fane, as already mentioned, was close to the mansion, and their way

to it led through the garden. As the old butler hobbled slowly along, often halting from pain, he described the funeral of the ill-fated captain, and painted Sir Hugh's affliction in such moving terms, that the whole sad scene rose before his listener. It was therefore in a frame of mind well suited to the occasion that Osbert found himself, shortly afterwards, in the large vault, standing by the coffin containing the remains of his unfortunate father. He was alone, for after unlocking the door of the vault, and pointing out the coffin, Jodrell set down the lantern and withdrew.

Fierce thoughts, excited by the descriptions he had heard of his father's tragical fate, swept through the young man's mind, and laying his hand upon the coffin, he exclaimed:

"Thou wert murdered, my father — foully murdered — and thy blood still cries for vengeance. It may be reserved for thy son to avenge thee. Heaven grant that the assassin may fall into my hands!"

But sadder and holier thoughts succeeded before he quitted the vault and returned to Jodrell.

They had just got back to the house, and were still in the large entrance-hall, when the noise of wheels was heard, and the carriage drove up to the door.

"Why, bless me!" exclaimed the butler, "here's

Sir Hugh back again already. He must have succeeded," he added, joyfully, "or he wouldn't have returned so soon. Huzza! huzza!"

Hurrying forward, he opened the folding-door, but his countenance fell as he perceived a stranger inside the carriage. While he was swallowing his chagrin, the carriage door was opened by the officious Pigot, the steps lowered, and the stranger alighted. Jodrell, of course, advanced towards him.

"Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue," said Pigot to the butler.

"Who did you say?" asked Jodrell.

Pigot repeated the name more deliberately. "Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue."

"I am come to see Mr. Osbert Leigh," said that personage. "Mention my name to him, if you please. Not that he knows me, but I was a very intimate friend of his —— of Captain Chetwynd."

"Oh, pray walk in, sir," said Jodrell, bowing. "Mr. Osbert Leigh will be very much pleased to see you, I'm sure. He's in the entrance-hall."

"I suppose I had better bring in your things, sir?" remarked the footman.

"Bring them in, by all means, Pigot," replied Mr. La Hogue. And he followed Jodrell into the entrance-hall.

On perceiving Osbert, he threw himself into a theatrical attitude, and exclaimed, like the Prince of Denmark addressing his father's shade,

"Can I believe my eyes? Angels and ministers! My old friend Clarence Chetwynd stands before me!"

"No, not the captain, sir, but his son," whispered Jodrell.

"My dear boy, how delighted I am to see you!" cried La Hogue, rushing up to him, and seizing his hand, which he shook most violently. "I was your father's bosom friend, and by all that's wonderful! I never saw a son so like his father."

"Quite true, sir," remarked Jodrell — "quite true. This is Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue, sir," he added to Osbert. "He appears to know all about you."

"Of course I know all about him," cried La Hogue, with a wink. "My dear Osbert, I was your father's most intimate friend — the depositary of all his secrets. I knew of his secret marriage," he added, with another wink.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Osbert, greatly surprised. "Have you given this information to Sir Hugh?"

"No, I met Sir Hugh at Aylesford, and ascertained his errand, but I wouldn't tell him anything till I had seen you, and satisfied myself that you are Clarence's son. I am now perfectly satisfied.

My dear boy, you are a Chetwynd, and no mistake."

"No mistake about it, sir — those were my very words," cried Jodrell, delighted.

"Now I'm here, my dear Osbert," pursued Mr. La Hogue, "I'll stay and make all right with Sir Hugh."

"But I can't presume to ask you to stay, sir," said Osbert; "I'm merely Sir Hugh's guest, as you are aware."

"Never mind that. I invite myself," rejoined the free-and-easy gentleman. "Sir Hugh will be delighted to see me, won't he, Jodrell?"

"Yes, I think — under the circumstances — he won't be very angry," replied the butler.

"Angry! no, I'll engage he won't," replied La Hogue. "Here I stay. Let my things be taken up to a room. You must have lots of rooms to spare, Jodrell. Fine old place, but thunderingly dull. By-the-by, Jodrell, my ride has made me hungry. Luncheon as soon as possible."

"Directly, sir. Please to step into the dining-room. The room on the right, sir."

"A very singular person, Jodrell," said Osbert, as La Hogue strutted into the dining-room. "I don't much like him."

"Humour him, sir — humour him," said the old butler. "He evidently possesses the information you require. Your father had some strange friends,

and this must be one of them. I have stretched a point in allowing him to remain, but I don't think — under the circumstances, as I said before — that Sir Hugh will be very angry with me."

So Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue established himself at Old Court, and, what is more, made up his mind to remain there.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK II.

THE EXPEDITION.

I.

The Contents of the Casket.

LEAVING Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue at Old Court, we will now follow Sir Hugh and Mr. Mainwaring to the Bell at Aylesford, where we shall find them established in the comfortable little parlour occupied years ago by the luckless Clarence Chetwynd. They had just finished breakfast, and Mainwaring, who was very hungry, had made a capital meal, having got through the best half of a broiled fowl, supplemented by a couple of eggs. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate, and the old gentleman, whose appetite was now fully satisfied, drew his chair beside it, and took up the *Times*, which had just been laid upon the breakfast-table by the waiter.

"Now this is what I call comfortable," said Mainwaring, adjusting his eye-glasses preparatory to a scrutiny of the "Latest Intelligence," and a perusal of the leading article. "Nothing like an old-fashioned inn, after all. Though, for the matter of that, I have never been in one of those grand new hotels, but I feel quite sure they're too large to be comfortable. Great halls, great staircases, vast rooms adorned with big mirrors, tables and chairs without

end — all gilding and glitter — hundreds of waiters, but no attendance; that's what I'm told your grand hotel is like. It wouldn't suit me."

"Nor me either," replied Sir Hugh, who had risen at the same time as his friend and approached the fire. "I don't mean to enter one of them. I am such a recluse, that I know very little of the actual world, but, so far as I can judge, everybody now lives for show, and comfort is entirely sacrificed for splendour. Railways have totally changed the old state of things. They have created the monster hotels you describe, which are necessities to people everlastingly moving from place to place — but I neither like railways nor monster hotels. The age is altogether too fast for me. But I am quite content," he added, with a grim smile, "to be left behind it."

"Railways may be very expeditious," said Mainwaring, "but I wish we had the old stage-coaches back again. When they were on the road we beat all the world in travelling, just as we beat it, or could have beaten it, with our army and navy. Now all that's upset. Time and distance are annihilated, folks will tell you, by the electric telegraph, but where's the gain if they are? We were just as well off — better, I think — before we had all this lightning-like intelligence. Here they are!" he added, glancing at the newspaper spread out on his lap. "Telegrams from all parts of the world — India, America, Russia, Prussia, Turkey. Very wonder-

ful, very exciting, very useful, no doubt. But, in my opinion, this rapid dissemination of news makes people restless and dissatisfied. They would have telegraphic messages every ten minutes if they could, and be in twenty places at once, were it possible. I agree with you, Sir Hugh. The pace at which the present generation goes is too fast — much too fast for safety — and a crash will come before long — a stupendous crash. Fortunes are made in no time by railway directors and promoters of public companies — how made we needn't inquire! — and spent as quickly as made. Bubbles of all kinds are blown and burst. It is the age of electricity, and everything must go like lightning. Young men often contrast the present times with the past, and think we must have been dull dogs, because we had no railways, no telegraph wires, no powerful steamers. But I can tell them differently. Not having any such wants — not perpetually craving for news — not caring to travel three hundred miles a day merely for the sake of travelling — we were content with our homes, attended to our own affairs, and were far happier. We hadn't got the electric fever, which now prevails to a far greater extent than the cattle plague, and is likely to do far more mischief. What is more, I believe we were a far greater nation then than we now are, for I can't help thinking that the English character is a good deal deteriorated."

"Nay, now you go further than I am disposed

to follow, my good friend," said Sir Hugh. "I certainly prefer the former generation to the present, and think many so-called improvements are no improvements at all; but we must not expect the world to stand still, nor complain because our old notions and old fashions are superseded. I should be sorry to think the English character deteriorated, but I do not believe it is so. I do not belong sufficiently to the present age to understand it, and will not, therefore, offer any opinion upon existing society. I have no desire to mingle with it, but that is simply because society of any kind is distasteful to me, as you know. The fault, therefore, rests with myself."

"What I meant to say," observed Mainwaring, "is, that Englishmen of the present day are not made of the same stout stuff that their fathers were. There are no John Bulls now-a-days."

"My good friend, you disprove your own assertion," rejoined Sir Hugh, smiling. "You are a well-preserved specimen of the genus. But we must cease this discussion. Recollect that I came here on particular business. I am about to summon the landlord. Amuse yourself with the *Times* while I talk to him."

Being informed that one of the gentlemen in the parlour desired to see him, Mr. Plessets promptly obeyed the summons. The waiter could not give him the gentleman's name, so that Plessets was to-

tally unprepared for a meeting with Sir Hugh, whom he instantly recognised, though he had not beheld him for many years — scarcely, indeed, since the inquest. Plessets had lost none of his bulk since we last met him in the same room — perhaps he was even fatter, but he looked tolerably well, all things considered. As he stood in great awe of the baronet, he remained near the door, until, being invited by Sir Hugh to come forward and take a seat, he respectfully obeyed.

“It is in reference to my lamented brother that I desire to speak to you, Plessets,” commenced Sir Hugh. “He was staying here on the night when — when he met his death. I believe you had some confidential conversation with him. Speak freely before Mr. Mainwaring,” he added, glancing at that gentleman, who appeared to be occupied with the newspaper, though he was listening attentively to what was said. “He was Captain Chetwynd’s intimate friend, and is almost as much interested as myself in the inquiries I am anxious to make. Now then, be good enough to tell me, so far as you can recollect, what passed between my brother and yourself on that fatal night.”

“You shall know all, Sir Hugh,” replied the landlord. “Every word that passed between us is graven on my memory. I should have detailed the conversation at the inquest, but I feared to distress you, and therefore held my tongue. But the

matter is so long past that it can scarcely give you pain now."

"Whether it pains me or not, let me hear what you have to relate, without any suppression," rejoined Sir Hugh.

"Then I'll come at once to the point, Sir Hugh. Your brother told me that he loved a lady on whom your affections were fixed — that she preferred him to you — and that no power on earth should induce him to resign her to you. You enjoined me to speak plainly, Sir Hugh," continued Plessets, noticing that the baronet had become pale as death, "and I have done so."

"Don't mind me, man," cried Sir Hugh, wiping the damps from his brow. "Cut as deeply as you will. I shan't wince. Did he tell you more? Did he inform you that he had married the lady?"

"No, Sir Hugh," replied Plessets, amazed. "Was he actually married to her?"

"Ay, married," replied the baronet.

"Bless my soul! this is a most astounding piece of information," cried Mainwaring, looking up. "I never heard even a hint of this before. Clarence Chetwynd married! To whom? in the name of all that's marvellous."

"Did you ever hear him speak of Amice?" said Sir Hugh.

"Yes, I think I have," returned Mainwaring, after a moment's reflection. "Amice Bourne, eh?"

"She was the person," replied Sir Hugh.

"But, if I recollect aright, she was a person of humble condition," said Mainwaring; "a farmer's daughter, or something of the sort. 'Sdeath! did he marry her?"

"Cast no reproach upon him for the step," cried Sir Hugh, sternly. "Judge what she must have been when I tell you that I myself would have married her if she had not preferred him."

"Ten thousand pardons," cried Mainwaring, greatly alarmed at the mistake he had committed, and dropping his eye-glasses in his agitation. "I didn't at all understand this — I have no doubt Miss Bourne was a most fascinating woman, or she couldn't have captivated you. Pray forgive me!"

"Both she and Clarence are dead, and all might be forgotten," said Sir Hugh, "were it not necessary to make some inquiries respecting her."

"By Jove! a light breaks upon me," exclaimed Mainwaring. "How infernally stupid I have been, to be sure!"

Sir Hugh enjoined silence by a gesture.

"All this is no news to me, Sir Hugh," remarked Plessets. "Your brother told me all particulars of the case, except that he made no mention of his marriage with the lady. Indeed, to speak the honest truth, I didn't think he was married to her. And I'll tell you why. Shortly after the lamentable occurrence at Kit's Coity House, I discovered that the

lady had resided at a cottage situated about half way between this place and Maidstone, and it appears pretty certain that the object that brought the captain to Aylesford on that fatal night was to pay a secret visit to her. Now, what does the poor lady do, after her husband's death — if indeed he was her husband? Does she appear at the inquest? Does she make any communication to you? No, she does nothing of the sort. She immediately disappears, and it is only by accident that her connexion with Captain Chetwynd is discovered. Does this look as if she were his wife?"

"Very shrewdly remarked, Mr. Plessets," observed Mainwaring.

"She was his wife, I tell you," said the baronet.

"Well, you know best, of course, Sir Hugh," remarked Plessets, rather sceptically. "But, to say the least of it, her conduct seems scarcely consistent with the character."

"Can you supply me with any information respecting her subsequent to her flight from the cottage?" said Sir Hugh.

"Not much," replied the landlord. "Curiosity led me to make inquiries about her, and I found out that she and her old woman-servant went to Tonbridge, where they remained in the strictest privacy for a week, when the lady again disappeared, leaving the old woman behind her."

"Is this all?" demanded the baronet, anxiously.

"Not quite all, Sir Hugh. I did hear of her again. The old woman, whose name was Margaret ——"

"Margaret Leigh," supplied Sir Hugh, glancing at Mainwaring, who nodded his head in reply.

"Yes, that was the name. Well, as I was saying, old Margaret was left behind at the obscure lodgings at Tonbridge, and when her mistress did not reappear became dreadfully uneasy, telling the landlady, Mrs. Bossall, who related the circumstances to me, that she was sure something dreadful had happened. However, her apprehensions in this respect were relieved, for a few days afterwards a letter arrived from her mistress, ordering her to join her without delay. The poor lady, it appeared, was at Ashford, and thither old Margaret immediately proceeded. I went over to Ashford on purpose to see her, being anxious to have some conversation with her about the poor captain; and I may say," he added, looking down, "to offer her assistance, in case she might need it; but I regret to say that I missed her. She was gone. It seems strange she should have quitted Mrs. Thornhill, whose little dwelling, humble though it was, had been a home to her, to seek another asylum, where she could scarcely expect to meet with so much kindness and attention, but she did so, and quite suddenly. Restlessness appears to have been part of her malady, poor soul! She did not say where she was going, nor how long she

should be away, but she promised to come back, and left a little box with Mrs. Thornhill, requesting her to take charge of it, but she never returned to reclaim it."

"You awaken my expectations only to disappoint them," cried Sir Hugh, rising, and pacing the room.

"Pray did Mrs. Thornhill examine the contents of the box entrusted to her by the lady?" inquired Mainwaring.

"I believe not," replied Plessets.

"Then she must have less curiosity than the rest of her sex."

"Is Mrs. Thornhill still alive?" demanded Sir Hugh, halting.

"Yes, Sir Hugh, and she still dwells at Ashford, in the same habitation in which Mrs. Bourne lodged with her."

"I will go to Ashford and see her," cried Sir Hugh.

"I will go with you if you desire it, Sir Hugh," said Plessets. "I quite understand that it is a delicate inquiry that you are engaged upon, but you may rely on me."

Sir Hugh expressed himself greatly obliged by the offer, and shortly afterwards the trio repaired to the station, and proceeded by Maidstone to Paddock Wood, and thence to Ashford.

They soon found themselves at Mrs. Thornhill's dwelling — a little detached cottage, near the bridge

across the Stour. Opening the door without knocking, Plessets went in, and his companions followed. The little room which they entered bore testimony to the tidy habits of its occupant. Everything looked neat and orderly. Everything was in its place. There was an old sofa, covered with chintz, with its back towards the window, a curious old clock with a brass face in one corner, a well-polished little table, and plenty of glasses and crockery neatly arranged on the shelves. A good fire burnt in the grate and shone on a clean hearth. Mrs. Thornhill was seated by the fire reading the best of books, but she immediately arose on the entrance of the visitors. She was an elderly little woman, thin and withered, and had a slight touch of palsy, but her features, though deeply furrowed, still retained a pleasing and kindly expression. She immediately recognised Plessets, and bade him welcome, and, on learning the errand of the strangers, begged them to be seated. Accordingly, they placed themselves on the sofa, while Plessets took up a position near the fire.

When the errand of her visitors was more fully explained to her she became greatly affected, and not being able to recover herself, quitted the room for a few minutes. On her return she brought a small ebony casket, which she placed upon the table.

"Poor Mrs. Bourne entrusted this little box to my care," she said, in a sorrowful tone, "desiring

me to take charge of it till her return, and I have kept it safely till now. But since you tell me she is dead I have no longer any business with it, and am ready to deliver it to those who have the right to it."

"I have that right, Mrs. Thornhill," said Sir Hugh, rising to take the casket.

"I don't question your right, sir," said Mrs. Thornhill, "but I should like to feel sure that I am delivering it to the proper person."

"I applaud your caution, my good woman," said Sir Hugh. "But have no fear. The casket shall be opened in your presence."

He then took up the little box and examined it. It was locked, and there was no key; but Sir Hugh signifying his wish that it should be broken open, Plessets produced a case-knife, and quickly forced the lock. The box only contained a few letters and a small pocket-book. The handwriting of all the letters which Sir Hugh took up was that of his brother, and after glancing at them for a moment he replaced them in the casket. His attention was next directed to the pocket-book. In it he found a piece of folded paper. Half guessing what it was, he eagerly opened it, and, after a moment's scrutiny, called out, regardless of the presence of Mrs. Thornhill:

"Here is proof positive of the marriage. Look, Mainwaring! Look, Plessets! Convince yourselves."

And he exhibited the document to their gaze.

It was the Marriage Certificate of Clarence Chetwynd and Amicia Bourne.

Both persons pressed forward to look at it, and Mrs. Thornhill regarded it from a distance with tearful eyes.

"All regular!" exclaimed Mainwaring, who had put on his glasses to examine the document. "Upon my soul! this is a most important discovery. They were married at Croydon, I perceive, and by the Rev. Walter Liddulph. This sets the matter completely at rest, but without this evidence I must frankly own that I should never have believed that the marriage actually took place."

"Neither should I," added Plessets. "But there's no doubt about it now."

"Then the poor lady was really Mrs. Chetwynd, and not Mrs. Bourne, as I supposed?" remarked Mrs. Thornhill.

"Ay," rejoined Sir Hugh. "There is no need now for concealment. She was my brother's wife."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, sir," rejoined Mrs. Thornhill, "and I am also very glad that the certificate has been found, for I was quite aware when she lodged with me that she was likely to become a mother. I hope she didn't die before the child was born?"

"No, her son yet lives, my good woman," said Sir Hugh. "It is on his account that I am making

the present inquiry. You have rendered him a most important service by so carefully preserving this box. What I require now are proofs of the child's birth, and of the mother's death, neither of which I possess."

"Would to Heaven I could aid you, sir!" exclaimed good Mrs. Thornhill. "But I have not the slightest notion what became of her after she left this house. I constantly expected to hear from her, but no letter came."

And she again burst into tears.

"Here, then, we are at fault," cried Sir Hugh, securing the pocket-book, in which he had replaced the precious document. "How shall I continue the search?"

"Perhaps something may be learnt from these letters," said Mainwaring, taking them out of the box to examine them.

"They are all from Clarence," said Sir Hugh, shuddering, and averting his gaze from them.

"Not all," remarked Mainwaring. "I know Clarence's hand well enough. Here's one not written by him, and addressed to Mrs. Bourne, with Mrs. Thornhill, near the Bridge, Ashford."

"I recollect that letter," cried the good dame. "It arrived three or four days before she left. I took it in myself, and noticed that it bore the Dover postmark."

"This is it!" exclaimed Mainwaring. "Let us

see what it says. Hurrah! we've recovered the scent. This letter is from John Baldwin, a house-agent, apparently informing Mrs. Bourne, that, according to her instructions, he has taken Cliff Cottage for her at Sandgate. She must have gone thither when she left."

"No doubt!" cried Sir Hugh. "We will proceed to Sandgate."

"First let us go to Dover, and look up the house-agent, Baldwin," said Mainwaring. "If he is alive he may give us all the information we require."

Sir Hugh agreed, and it was settled that they should start by the first train for Dover. While taking leave of Mrs. Thornhill, and thanking her for the important service she had rendered him, Sir Hugh made her a handsome present, which the good dame very reluctantly accepted. Mainwaring took charge of the casket. Before parting with Plessets, who accompanied them to the station, Sir Hugh engaged him to come over in a few days to Old Court.

The two gentlemen had not to wait long for a train, nor were they long on the way. In little more than half an hour after quitting Ashford, they arrived at Dover.

II.

How further Information was obtained at Dover.

PROCEEDING to that old and comfortable hotel the Ship, which they selected in preference to its ostentatious rival, they secured rooms, and then repaired to Snargate-street, where the house-agent's offices were situated. Mr. Baldwin still occupied his old offices, but, unluckily, he was not at home, and not expected back till late at night; and his clerk could give Sir Hugh no information respecting Cliff Cottage, Sandgate. He did not even know there was such a cottage, and so many years had elapsed since the place was let that he could not refer to the books. But he promised that Mr. Baldwin should call upon Sir Hugh at the Ship about ten o'clock next morning, and with this promise the baronet was obliged to be content. Too impatient, however, to brook so much delay, he took the railway to Folkestone, leaving Mainwaring to amuse himself by watching the arrival and departure of the packets, and desiring him to order dinner at eight o'clock, by which hour he expected to be back.

This arrangement was very agreeable to the old gentleman, who, though eager for a solution of the mystery, had had enough trouble for the day; so

after a little confabulation with the most obliging and intelligent of landlords, whom he had known many years ago, and who recollected him perfectly, he buttoned up his great-coat, put on his shawl, and proceeded to the pier.

All was new to him, and so changed, that he scarcely knew the place. However, there was the proudly-situated castle on the cliffs, looking down upon him majestically, to convince him that he was in Dover, and he was obliged to confess to himself that the changes which had taken place in the town were for the better. As he walked along the magnificent new pier, with the breeze blowing against his face, and saw the waves dashing against the granite masses, he was struck by the grandeur and solidity of the work. Sharp though it was, the breeze inspirited him and did him good, while every object he beheld — sailors, packets, shipping, craft of all sizes in the harbour — had a novelty for him. The bustle of the landing-places, the shouts of the sailors, all amused him, and he began to feel a strong inclination to cross over to France.

In this manner time slipped by insensibly, and it was dark before he began to think of returning to the Ship. Numberless lights marked the outline of the town, and the noble old fortress was just distinguishable through the gloom, looking like an enchanted castle on the lofty hill.

Much as he had enjoyed his stroll on the pier,

and invigorated as he felt by the sea-air he had inhaled, the old gentleman was by no means displeased to find himself seated by a good fire in a comfortable room, and none the worse for the glass of fine old sherry administered by his attentive host. Thus corroborated, and with the *Pall Mall Gazette* to discuss, he felt well able to wait for dinner.

By-and-by Sir Hugh made his appearance, his looks announcing ill success. He had searched Sandgate in vain. No Cliff Cottage was to be found. Years ago there was a small tenement so designated, but it had been pulled down and a marine villa erected in its place. No one remembered Mrs. Bourne.

The dinner was excellent: capital Dover soles fried to perfection, a saddle of mutton roasted to a turn, a woodcock, and a savoury omelette — all of which Mainwaring enjoyed prodigiously, though they did not tempt the abstemious baronet, who ate very sparingly. In consequence of this, Mainwaring got considerably more than his share of the sherry, and felt bound to finish the bottle of old port brought for them by the host. Sir Hugh retired early, and left him to the enjoyment of his wine, and at a later hour the old gentleman marched off to bed in a very genial condition.

Habitually an early riser, Sir Hugh was out next morning as soon as it was light, and this was past seven o'clock, for we must not forget that it

was mid-winter, and after visiting the pier, walking round the quays, and gazing at the various objects which possessed as much novelty and interest for him as for Mainwaring, he mounted to the castle heights, and contemplated the almost unequalled sea view which they command. It was a clear fresh morning, and the French coast was perfectly discernible. A smart breeze was blowing in the Channel, and numerous large ships were in sight. Enthralled by the superb view, Sir Hugh for a while forgot his cares, and it was with a sigh that he prepared to descend by the steep steps to the town. On his return he found Mainwaring waiting for him, and looking none the worse for his potations over-night. The old gentleman was occupied with the paper, as usual. The breakfast equipage was on the table, and the bell being rung, the materials for an excellent repast were brought in — broiled fish of two sorts, cutlets, sausages, stewed kidneys, broiled ham and eggs. At this profuse repast Mainwaring played an active part, as was his wont, but Sir Hugh took nothing more than a modicum of dry toast and a cup of tea, without either cream or sugar.

“Sorry to find the sea air has not improved your appetite, Sir Hugh,” observed Mainwaring. “It has made me ferociously hungry. These broiled soles are capital. Do try ’em. You can’t eat soles in perfection except here or at Hastings, so don’t throw away the opportunity. Our worthy host says

these are just caught, and I'll swear he's right, for they're wonderfully full of flavour. Try 'em, I beg of you."

Sir Hugh shook his head.

"I envy you your good appetite, Mainwaring," he said. "I have none. The daintiest dish fails to tempt me."

"I marvel you can exist on so little," remarked Mainwaring, helping himself to some stewed kidneys.

"Were I to eat those I should soon cease to exist," said the baronet. "You must have marvellous powers of digestion."

"So I have, Heaven be thanked! Never ill in all my life — that is, very rarely — and only in consequence of indiscretion. You would be all the better if you followed my example," he added, again applying to the kidneys.

"I have done," said Sir Hugh. "But pray don't hurry yourself."

And he got up and moved to the fire.

"I never do hurry myself at breakfast, or any other meal," remarked Mainwaring, attacking the cutlets, and pursuing his course with unabated vigour.

The old gentleman had not quite finished when Mr. Baldwin was introduced by the waiter. He was rather an elderly man, tall, thin, grey, and wore spectacles. He was very civil, and regretted exceedingly that he had not been at home when Sir

Hugh did him the honour to call on the previous day. He then proceeded to explain, that on being informed of the object of Sir Hugh's inquiries, he had refreshed his memory by reference to his books, and found that it was about twenty-one years ago since he let Cliff Cottage to Mrs. Bourne.

"I perfectly recollect the circumstance," he said. "She wrote to me from Ashford, inquiring about a cottage near the sea-side, and I replied that I had one to let at Sandgate, which I thought would suit her exactly. The rent was very moderate, and she agreed to take the cottage, and came to it shortly afterwards with an old woman-servant. But she didn't occupy the place long. She was out of health, and Sandgate didn't agree with her, I suppose. She only remained two months at Cliff Cottage."

"Whither did she go next, Mr. Baldwin?" demanded Sir Hugh. "It is most important to me to ascertain that point."

"I am happy to be able to give you further information respecting her," replied Baldwin. "On quitting Sandgate, Mrs. Bourne went to Hastings."

"To Hastings!" exclaimed Sir Hugh.

"Yes, but she didn't remain there more than a week. She then moved on to Lewes, and after staying there for another week, proceeded to Brighton. I am able to furnish you with these particulars, because I corresponded with her at the time,

and have preserved her letters. As I have stated, she proceeded from Lewes to Brighton."

"Well, I trust she stopped at Brighton, Mr. Baldwin," observed Mainwaring from the breakfast-table. "We can't follow her along the whole coast of Sussex."

"No, sir, she did not stop at Brighton. She went on to Portslade, a small village between Brighton and Shoreham."

"I know it," grunted Mainwaring.

"If you know Portslade, sir, you may know a pretty little house on the green near the church. Ivy Cottage it is called. She took that house. There my information ends, gentlemen; I can tell you nothing further."

"Then you don't know whether she died at Portslade, Mr. Baldwin?" asked Sir Hugh.

"Till this moment, I was not even aware of her death," replied the house-agent. "I received one letter from her after her arrival at Portslade, but with that our correspondence terminated. I know nothing more. But you will easily obtain information on the spot."

"I will go to Brighton for that purpose to-day," said Sir Hugh. "I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Baldwin, and I hope you will allow me to compensate you for the service you have rendered me. I cannot take up your valuable time for nothing."

"I am equally obliged to you, Sir Hugh," replied the house-agent, "but I require no compensation. In the last letter which I received from poor Mrs. Bourne, she remitted me a five-pound note, which more than covered my charges, so that in reality I have been all this time in her debt. I wish you good morning, gentlemen," he added, rising and taking up his hat. "I trust your inquiries may be successful."

"One word more, Mr. Baldwin," said Sir Hugh. "You mentioned that you have preserved Mrs. Bourne's letters. Should they be required, you will have no objection to deliver them up?"

"Not the slightest," observed the obliging house-agent.

And bowing to both gentlemen, he departed.

"A mighty civil fellow," remarked Mainwaring, as the door was closed. "Well, I suppose we must be off to Brighton, Sir Hugh, eh? Can't you postpone the journey till to-morrow? We're very well off here, and I should enjoy another day at Dover."

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you," rejoined the baronet. "We must go to Brighton. I detest the place, and shan't stop there long."

"Long enough to see your daughter, I presume?" remarked Mainwaring.

"Ah, Lucetta!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, a sudden pang shooting across his breast. "For the moment

I had forgotten that she is in Brighton. I am not sure that I shall see her. An unexpected visit from me would be anything but agreeable to Lady Danvers, and I have no desire to bore her ladyship. No, I don't think I shall call on them."

The bill was paid, and moderate enough it was, considering the quality of the wine which Mainwaring had imbibed, the carpet-bags were expeditiously packed up and conveyed to the station, and in less than half an hour the two gentlemen had bidden adieu to Dover, and were dashing through the tunnel which desecrates Shakspeare's Cliff. Our friends had taken the South-Eastern line to Red-hill, and in due time reached their destination.

III.

The Rencounter at Red-hill.

AT Red-hill junction they found, as many other persons have found to their annoyance, that there was no junction at all. The train they expected to catch was just gone, and there was no other train to Brighton for nearly two hours. This was vexatious, but there was no help. Wait they must. The delay, however, Mr. Mainwaring thought, would enable them to partake of a little luncheon, and the baronet acceding to the suggestion, they repaired to Mr. Laker's pretty little inn adjoining the station. The aspect of the pleasant hostel, with its rustic porch and latticed windows, favourably impressed them both, and they entered a cheerful-looking room on the right, in which blazed a good fire.

Mainwaring having most interest in the luncheon, ordered some cold meat, and this done, marched to the fire, and stood with his back before it in the Englishman's most approved style, while Sir Hugh, who seemed insensible to cold, took up a paper, and sat down in the recess formed by a bay-window. There were only two other persons in the room besides himself and Sir Hugh, and these were seated at a table near the windows on the opposite side

looking upon the garden. No doubt they were in the same predicament as our travellers, and were beguiling the tedium of delay by luncheon. Mutton-chops and pale ale, diluted with Seltzer-water, were before them.

Both were very handsome, stylish-looking men — unmistakably military — though of course in the ordinary attire of gentlemen. We may as well state at once that they were no other than Captain Fanshaw and his brother-officer, Major Trevor. They were going on by the South-Eastern Railway, but, like our friends, had been brought to a halt at Redhill. When Mainwaring first glanced at them, the two officers were talking of some military friends whom they had just encountered at the station, and who were proceeding to Aldershot. This did not much interest the old gentleman, but he began to prick up his ears at what followed.

“This stoppage will make us confoundedly late at Old Court,” said Fanshaw. “The place is most inconveniently situated — nearly an hour’s drive from Edenbridge — and we shall be some time in getting a trap.”

“Have you ever been to Old Court?” inquired Major Trevor.

“Never,” replied Rainald. “Lady Danvers describes it as a most dismal place, but I have had a very different description of it from some one else,

who is much better able to judge about it than her ladyship."

"What the deuce can take them to Old Court?" thought Mainwaring, glancing at Sir Hugh, who looked up slightly from the newspaper he was reading.

"I tell you what, major," said Fanshaw, lowering his voice, but not so much so as to render what he said inaudible to the listeners, "my courage begins to fail me. Last night, at the Courcy Dormers', I felt as bold as a lion, but now I am very much in the state of Bob Acres when he went out to fight the duel. Upon my soul! I'd rather go through a second Balaclava charge than face this formidable baronet."

"Bah! you'll go through the business well enough," rejoined Major Trevor, laughing. "But what sort of person is Sir Hugh, that you should stand in such awe of him? You're not generally timorous."

Here Sir Hugh glanced at Mainwaring, intimating that it would be proper to interpose.

"Ahem! gentlemen," said Mainwaring, coughing slightly to attract their attention. "I fancy you are speaking of Sir Hugh Chetwynd, of Old Court. I think it right to mention that he is my particular friend."

"We were not talking any harm of him, I hope, sir," rejoined Rainald. "I have not the pleasure of

knowing Sir Hugh personally, but as you say you are intimately acquainted with him, perhaps you will be good enough to tell us what he is like. Describe him, if you please."

"Perhaps you have got his photograph?" said Major Trevor, laughing.

"No, sir, I have not," replied Mainwaring, rather dryly. "Sir Hugh never had his photograph taken."

"I'm aware of it," remarked Rainald. "Miss Chetwynd informed me of his peculiarity in that respect. She never could induce him, she told me, to sit for his portrait. Strange repugnance, eh, major?"

"Absurd!" laughed Trevor. "An ill-looking fellow, I should imagine."

"Soh! then you know Lucetta?" said Mainwaring, glancing at Sir Hugh while putting the question.

"Slightly," replied Rainald. "I have met her out in society at Brighton. A remarkably fine girl! Don't you think so?"

"I never met her equal, and I've seen a good many fine girls in my time," replied the old gentleman.

"We're all agreed about Miss Chetwynd," remarked Major Trevor. "She's a monstrous fine girl — the reigning belle of Brighton. But tell us about her father. What's he like? We're going to

see him, and want to know what sort of person we shall find."

"Are you going to him by invitation, gentlemen, may I ask?" said Mainwaring.

"No; we're going to take him by surprise," responded Rainald — "by surprise, eh, major?"

"Yes, we shall surprise him immensely," laughed Trevor.

"Not more than you surprise me, gentlemen," said Mainwaring. "I can assure you that Sir Hugh Chetwynd is not a person to be intruded upon."

An interruption was here offered rather opportunely by the waiter, who brought in a fine cold sirloin of beef and a bowl of smoking potatoes, and placed them on a table. Ordering a tankard of Allsopp, Mainwaring sat down, and set vigorously to work upon the juicy sirloin, but Sir Hugh declined to join in the repast.

"Bring the bill, waiter," cried Captain Fanshaw, consulting his watch. "We must be off directly. I'll have another turn with that old buffer," he whispered to the major. "You haven't yet described Sir Hugh Chetwynd to us, sir?" he continued, addressing Mainwaring. "He is very haughty and reserved, eh?"

"Quite the contrary," replied Mainwaring, who had heard himself called an old buffer, and determined to be even with them. "Extremely affable and agreeable. I don't know a more courteous per-

son than Sir Hugh. Splendid sirloin this," he added, as he placed a couple of slices on his plate.

"But he leads a very solitary unsociable life — never has any visitors, eh?"

"Wrong again," rejoined Mainwaring. "At this very time he has a house full of company — jolly doings, I can promise you — ha! ha! I ought to know, for I've just left Old Court."

"This is not at all what you led me to expect, Fanshaw," observed Major Trevor. "I understood from you that Old Court was the dullest place imaginable, and Sir Hugh ——"

"Hush!" cried Rainald. "I suspect the old buffer is chaffing us. I'm glad to hear what you tell me, sir," he added to Mainwaring. "Apparently Sir Hugh takes advantage of his daughter's absence to invite his friends."

"That's it," rejoined Mainwaring. "He's in no hurry for her return — ha! ha!"

"And now as to his personal appearance?" interposed Major Trevor. "Since you can't show us his photograph, tell us what he's like."

"He's rather like me — only considerably fatter," replied Mainwaring, taking a pull at the Allsopp which the waiter had set on the table beside him. "He suffers terribly from gout, and it's not to be wondered at, considering the tremendous rate at which he lives — drinks his two bottles of old port every day after dinner — to say nothing of the hock

and champagne that have gone before. By-the-by, I'll give you a hint. Sir Hugh has some wonderful Serchial Madeira. I recommend you to try it, since you're going to Old Court."

"Thank you," said Major Trevor. "I shall make a point of doing so."

"Your description of Sir Hugh differs most materially from all I have heard of him," said Rainald. "But I hope it may prove correct. If so, we shall have a pleasanter visit than we anticipated — eh, major?"

"Much pleasanter," replied Trevor. "I like the notion of the Madeira immensely. It's a wine one don't get now-a-days. Has the old boy a good smoking-room?" he added, taking out his cigar-case as he spoke.

"None in particular," responded Mainwaring; "but you may smoke where you please, now that Miss Chetwynd is away — in the hall, in the library, in the dining-room, in the billiard-room — in your bedroom — Sir Hugh doesn't object — rather likes it."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the major. "You incidentally mentioned a billiard-room, sir. Is Sir Hugh fond of billiards?"

"Remarkably fond," replied the old gentleman, "and plays a very good game. He'll give you ten, and beat you."

"Will he?" cried the major. "I should like to see him do it."

"If you care for whist," said Mainwaring, who, having got into the vein, couldn't check himself, "you'll get a rubber at Old Court. Sir Hugh sits down to whist every night, and doesn't set his face against *écarté*."

"I can stand this no longer!" cried the subject of the conversation, getting up and stepping towards the table, at which the officers were seated. "Gentlemen, my friend is jesting with you. Sir Hugh Chetwynd is exactly the reverse of what he has been represented. He keeps no company, gives very bad dinners, drinks no wine, never had a touch of gout in his life, never plays at cards or billiards, and detests smoking. I won't say that he is absolutely inhospitable, but he is the next thing to it."

"Stop! stop!" cried Mainwaring. "I won't hear Sir Hugh calumniated. I may have exaggerated a little, gentlemen, but my description is right in the main, as you'll find when you get to Old Court."

"It may save you some trouble, gentlemen," said the baronet, "if you will mention your business to me. I shall see Sir Hugh before long, and will mention it to him."

"Are you his man of business, sir?" inquired Major Trevor, rather impertinently.

"He does nothing without consulting me," re-

joined the other. "Your business, whatever it may be, is sure to be referred to me."

"No, it wouldn't be proper," said Rainald, after a moment's reflection. "I must go to Old Court."

"I advise you not. You will be disappointed," said Sir Hugh. "But since you are resolved, I'll give you a letter. I will ensure you admittance to the hall, which might otherwise be refused you. Favour me with your names?"

"Captain Fanshaw and Major Trevor, 40th Hussars," replied Rainald.

Sir Hugh sat down at a side-table, on which there were writing materials, and traced a few hasty lines on a sheet of note-paper, which he enclosed in an envelope, and then directing the letter, gave it to Captain Fanshaw.

"A thousand thanks!" exclaimed Rainald. "But this letter, I observe, is addressed to Mr. Jodrell."

"Jodrell is Sir Hugh's butler — his factotum, in short," returned the baronet. "If Sir Hugh should be from home, pray stay till to-morrow. I'm pretty sure he'll be back then. Make yourselves quite at home. Do just as you please."

"You speak as if the house were your own, sir," remarked Rainald, laughing.

"I am accustomed to consider myself at home at Old Court," rejoined Sir Hugh. "Perhaps we may meet again there."

While the two officers, aided by the assiduous

waiter, were putting on their rough over-coats, and otherwise preparing to fence out the cold, Mainwaring called out, in a jocular tone,

"Good day, gentlemen. You'll soon find out whether my description of Sir Hugh, or my friend's, is the most accurate. Don't forget to ask Jodrell for the Serchial Madeira, and a bottle of Sir Christopher's old port."

After an exchange of parting civilities, the two officers quitted the room. While they were in the passage outside, lighting their cigars, Mr. Laker came out of his room to see them off, and Captain Fanshaw inquired if he knew the two gentlemen in the coffee-room.

"The old gentleman with the purple face is Mr. Mainwaring — rather a well-known man about town in former days," replied Mr. Laker. "But I don't know his friend."

"Ah! it's the friend that I'm curious about, Laker," said Captain Fanshaw — "the tall dark gentleman. You don't know him, eh?"

"I do not, sir," replied Mr. Laker; "never saw him before, that I'm aware of."

The cigars being lighted, the two officers departed, taking their way to the station.

"An odd idea has occurred to me," remarked Rainald, as they walked along. "I can't help thinking that tall dark man must be Sir Hugh Chetwynd."

"The devil! Let us go back, and make sure."

"No, that would be a wrong move," rejoined Rainald. "He would have made himself known if he had been so disposed. I mustn't offend him. If it should be Sir Hugh, he must be on the way to Brighton to see Lucetta. She and her aunt will make all right, and obviate the necessity of explanations on my part. We'll go on to Old Court, and await his return."

"And have a jolly carouse," said the major, laughing. "You've got a letter to the butler. We'll make him produce some of that famous Serchial."

"Upon my soul, it will be quite an adventure — something to talk about to Lucetta," said Rainald. "I shall be charmed to visit every nook and corner of the old house in which the dear girl has passed her life."

Chatting in this way they entered the station, and almost before they had finished their cigars the train brought them to Edenbridge, where they got out, and engaged a conveyance to Old Court.

"I tell you what, Sir Hugh," remarked Mainwaring, as they were left alone in the coffee-room, "it's my belief that Captain Fanshaw is going to Old Court to ask your consent to his marriage with Lucetta. Well, he's a deuced fine-looking fellow. Don't you think so?"

"I think nothing about him," rejoined the baronet,

coldly. "You may be right, but if he had asked my consent as he stood there, I should have refused him."

"Then I'm uncommonly glad he didn't," said Mainwaring. "See Lucetta, and hear what she has to say before you decide. Perhaps her affections are engaged to this handsome young fellow. He's just the man to win a girl's heart."

"I shall bestow no thought on the subject till my present inquiries are ended," said Sir Hugh. "Have you done?"

"Quite," replied the old gentleman, rising from the table.

The bill was paid, great-coats put on, the waiter gratified, and in their turn they marched to the station, but without cigars. They had not been long upon the crowded and bustling platform, when they were greeted with cries of "Train for Brighton!" In another minute the train came up, and entering a carriage, they were borne swiftly off to the Queen of Watering Places. On arriving there, they drove at once to the Old Ship, in compliance with a suggestion from Mainwaring, who retained a very agreeable recollection of that excellent house.

IV.

How Sir Hugh and his Friend were stopped on the West Cliff, and whom they beheld during the Stoppage.

SIR HUGH did not alight, but remained in the hired carriage at the door of the hotel, while Mainwaring secured rooms, and held a brief conference with the complaisant Mr. Bacon on the all-important subject of dinner. This point being settled to his entire satisfaction — Mr. Bacon had promised him a bottle of '34 port — he rejoined his companion, and the coachman being ordered to drive to Portslade, set off at the slow pace habitual to Brighton fly-drivers, who ought to take a lesson from their London brethren of the whip.

The afternoon being very fine, nothing could be gayer and more animating than the scene presented to them — a smooth sparkling sea spreading on the left — crowds of well-dressed people on the footways — and a throng of splendid equipages in the road. In fact, the carriages were so numerous, that our friends, whose progress was slow enough to begin with, could soon scarcely get on at all. Everybody seemed cheerful: lively discourse and light laughter continually caught the ear. Mainwaring, who had not been in Brighton for some years, but who re-

collected it well in George IV.'s time, was struck with the improvements, and charmed with all he beheld. He was delighted with the shops, with the multitudes of pretty women (where are so many pretty women to be seen as at Brighton?), with the number and variety of the equipages — above all, with the horses. He declared he had never seen such horses, and wondered where the deuce they all came from? Mr. March Ripley passed him in his well-appointed drag, and the young banker's matchless turn-out and pair of chesnuts elicited the old gentleman's warm approval. "That young fellow drives well," he said, "and has a capital pair of light horses — almost thorough-bred. My stars! what's that?" he continued, as, having reached a somewhat more open space just beyond the battery, a lightly built trap, with large wheels, and drawn by a wonderful black horse with flowing mane and tail, dashed past like a meteor, scarcely allowing Mainwaring to notice the build of the vehicle, or the appearance of the driver. All that Mainwaring could discern of the latter was, that he was a handsome man with a reddish-coloured beard. The gentleman in question was no other than the hospitable Mr. Courcy Dormer exercising one of his Russian horses. A hundred eyes followed him in his rapid flight, but he was out of sight in a second.

"By Jove! that horse must be doing twenty miles an hour," cried Mainwaring, who had thrust

his head out of the window to look after him. "I didn't think there was such an animal," added the old gentleman, little dreaming that Mr. Courcy Dormer had a dozen such.

Scarcely had the admiration excited by this spectacle subsided, than the fly-driver came to a halt, and, on looking out, Mainwaring perceived that two carriages, coming from opposite directions, which had been drawn up close together, to allow their fair occupants a moment's converse, had occasioned the stoppage. Both were splendid open barouches, well appointed in all respects, and vied with, if they did not surpass in elegance, any that Mainwaring had as yet seen on the Cliff. But it was not the carriages — it was not the portly and bearded Russian coachman on the box of one of them — nor the magnificent horses — nor the ladies who graced the carriages — but a lovely girl who sat in the barouche coming from the west, and who consequently faced him, that attracted Mainwaring's special attention. He knew this fair young creature, and he also knew the lady by her side, but he did not know Mrs. Courcy Dormer, with whom they were conversing, though he was struck by her attire, and by the amiable expression of her countenance.

All the ladies were wrapped in velvets and furs — but they all wore charming bonnets, with the exception of Lucetta, whose dark tresses were covered by a most bewitching little hat. Unconscious of the

admiration she excited among the passers-by, many of whom stopped to gaze at her, astonished by her beauty, she laughed and talked to Mrs. Courcy Dormer, displaying fresh charms every moment. A soft bloom dyed her cheeks, and gave additional brilliancy to her eyes.

It was Sir Hugh's fortune once more to hear himself discussed. The fly, in which he and Mainwaring sat, had stopped so close to the two carriages, that not a word uttered by the ladies escaped them.

The moment Mainwaring had discovered Lucetta, he called her father's attention to her, but Sir Hugh shrank back, and desired him not to make himself known. Thus the lovely girl, whose attention was otherwise occupied, was wholly unaware of their propinquity.

"Ah! my dear Miss Chetwynd," said Mrs. Courcy Dormer, "you don't know what an amount of mischief you did last night."

"Mischief!" exclaimed Lucetta, blushing. "Pray, what did I do?"

"You made many wretched to make one happy," rejoined Mrs. Courcy Dormer, archly. "I've met dozens of disconsolate beaux during my drive. Mr. Hunsdon is broken-hearted, and has ridden off to Rottingdean, with the avowed intention of throwing himself over the cliff, and Mr. March Ripley looks the picture of despair."

"Why, Mr. Ripley passed us just now, and I thought looked unusually cheerful," said Lucetta; "and Mr. Hunsdon will think twice before he throws away his precious life in that absurd manner. You may be sure you will see him at the Pavilion ball to-night."

"Are you going to the ball, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Dormer. "I suppose not," she added, glancing at Lady Danvers.

"No, it wouldn't be proper," said her ladyship. "Not that there can be any engagement," she added, leaning forward, and lowering her voice, "till we hear from Sir Hugh. Captain Fanshaw has gone to Old Court to-day to ask his consent."

"I told you so," whispered Mainwaring to the baronet.

"My good wishes go with him, at all events," said Mrs. Courcy Dormer, smiling. "I dare say Mr. Hunsdon, and Mr. Ripley, and some of the other disconsolates, wish he may come to grief, as they would call it, but there's no chance of that."

"There will ever be uncertainty where Sir Hugh is concerned," rejoined Lady Danvers, again speaking in a low voice. "I've already told you he is a very odd man."

"Odd he may be, dear aunty," cried Lucetta, "but he's the dearest and kindest creature in the

world. His slightest wishes are law to me, and I would never do anything to displease him."

"There, do you hear that — you fortunate papa?" whispered Mainwaring.

"We won't anticipate the slightest difficulty, for I'm sure none will arise," said Mrs. Courcy Dormer. "Sir Hugh cannot fail to be pleased with Captain Fanshaw, and the connexion — so far as I am able to judge, and my husband concurs with me in opinion — is altogether suitable. So I make no doubt we shall have joyful tidings when the captain comes back, and I trust he may bring Sir Hugh with him, for then my curiosity will be gratified. I quite long to see your papa, Miss Chetwynd."

"Call me Lucetta, please, dear Mrs. Dormer," said the young lady. "I should like it so much better — from you."

"Well, Lucetta, be sure to bring Sir Hugh to call upon us when he comes — and come he must. Mr. Dormer will be delighted to see him. I hope he will dine with us — as quietly as he pleases."

"Papa never dines out, dear Mrs. Dormer," said Lucetta.

"Perhaps he may on this occasion. Mind, I shall never forgive you if you don't bring him."

"I will if I can, but I daren't promise," rejoined Lucetta. "Besides, I haven't the slightest expectation that papa will come to Brighton. He never stirs from home."

"She little thinks that papa is so near her," chuckled Mainwaring.

"Ordinarily not, but this event will bring him out, be sure," said Mrs. Dormer.

"My dear Mrs. Dormer, you don't know Sir Hugh, or you wouldn't say so," exclaimed Lady Danvers. "I should just as soon expect to see the Czar of Russia in Brighton as my stay-at-home brother-in-law."

"Nevertheless, I hope to see him," said Mrs. Dormer. "I have a message to you from my husband, Lucetta dear, but I can't deliver it now."

"We saw him just now in his Baltimore gig with his fly-away Russian horse, and he looked as if he had something to say, but couldn't stop to utter it," laughed Lucetta. "That was five minutes ago. He must be at Newhaven by this time."

Adieux were then exchanged by the ladies, and the carriages moved on in opposite directions, enabling the slow-going fly to crawl on. Occupied with other matters, neither Lucetta nor Lady Danvers had noticed the fly or those inside it.

V.

The Grave in Portslade Churchyard.

WHILE Lucetta was proceeding towards Kemp Town, giving new life to the Eastern Cliff, and receiving homage from a hundred cavaliers, her father and his old friend were creeping on in the opposite direction totally unregarded. Past the Grand Hotel they went, past the New Pier, past Brunswick-terrace, and then leaving the gay crowd behind, past the ranges of houses and villas, which, disdaining the homely designation of Hove, have adopted the fine-sounding title of Cliftonville. Quitting this rapidly-increasing suburb, which looks like Saint John's Wood transported to the sea-side, they attained a little elevation commanding the whole line of coast as far as Worthing, together with the inlet forming Shoreham harbour. The coast here is very flat, and not particularly interesting — as most of our readers may be aware — but the day being remarkably fine, it was seen to advantage, and Mainwaring enjoyed the drive in spite of the taciturnity of his companion. The pretty little village of Portslade, with its ancient church on a gentle hill surrounded by trees, had been visible long before they reached it, and as they now turned off on the right,

and came to the green, Sir Hugh ordered the driver to stop, and alighted with his companion.

As they walked across the green, Sir Hugh glanced around at the different habitations, and soon selected one answering to the description he had received of Ivy Cottage. On proceeding to the little tenement, the walls and chimneys of which were overgrown with the dark green plant, he found he had guessed right. It was the cottage he was looking for, but the persons who dwelt there had only recently taken the house, and had never heard of Mrs. Bourne. However, he ascertained from a woman who answered his inquiries that the best person to apply to was the parish clerk and sexton, who was born in Portslade, and knew all that happened in the village for the last sixty or seventy years.

"Old Nathan Moulscombe can give you the information you require, sir, if any one can," said the woman. "I saw him go up to the church not a quarter of an hour ago. You'll find him there."

Sir Hugh thanked her, and he and Mainwaring ascended the eminence on which the grey old pile is built. In summer, when the trees are in full leaf, this reverend structure has a picturesque appearance, and even now, though robbed of half its beauty, it had a deep interest in the eyes of one of those who approached it. On reaching the porch they found that the door was open, and they had scarcely set foot in the sacred building, when an old

man with a large key in his hand came from the chancel and saluted them. Though verging on fourscore, old Nathan Moulscombe looked hale and hearty, and likely to last for a few more winters. His locks were white as snow, but his brows even now were black and bushy. Old Nathan had thought that the gentlemen merely came to look at the church, but, on learning their errand, he conducted them to the vestry, and then supplied them with very important information.

"I recollect poor Mrs. Bourne very well," he said. "She came to Portslade rather more than twenty years ago, and lived in Ivy Cottage with her old servant Margaret Leigh. She was a piously inclined lady, and there wasn't a person in the village came more reg'lar to church than she did — at first. I'm partikler in sayin' 'at first,' because you'll see what happened afterwards, gentlemen. Though reg'lar, as I've said, at her devotions, she declined to see the vicar, Mr. Fairbanks, when he called upon her. Well, this disinclination on her part was soon accounted for. I don't know whether I shall hurt your feelings by what I'm about to say, gentlemen, but it's the fact. Her appearance showed that if she warn't married she ought to have been, and folks began to talk about it, and shake their heads, and I suppose some of the women tossed up their heads at her, for after that she came no more to church. But I used often to see her at eventide

in the churchyard, and sometimes on moonlight nights she would come there and wander about like a troubled sperrit. One night — I remember it well — I was in the churchyard, and seeing her flitting about, I tried to avoid her, but she beckoned me to follow her, and I did so in fear and tremblin' — in fear and tremblin', as I'm a sinner, gentlemen — until she led me to a partikler spot, where she told me she would like to be buried, and made me promise that her wish should be complied with. Well, gentlemen, I was as good as my word. She were buried in that identical spot. But I mustn't anticipate. I almost wonder the poor lady remained at Portslade, for she had not even an acquaintance, much less a friend. But she seemed to like the village, and perhaps had a motive for staying here. After a time she began to discontinue her evening rambles, and was never seen outside the cottage. I pretty well guessed what this meant, and my conjectures proved right. Doctor Hurdis was suddenly sent for one night, and before morning she was brought to bed of a fine boy."

"A boy! mark that," said Sir Hugh to Mainwaring.

"I do," replied the old gentleman.

"A boy it was, and a very fine boy into the bargain," resumed Moulscombe. "I can speak to it, for I held the babby in my own arms. Poor lady! she didn't live long to taste a mother's hap-

piness, but was removed to a better world. Only three days after the infant was born she was taken dangerously ill with fever, and the moment he beheld her, Doctor Hurdis declared she couldn't recover. Poor soul! she knew that as well as the doctor, for she told him she shouldn't live many hours, and, what is more, she didn't desire to live. 'You tell me the babe is strong and healthy, and likely to do well. That is enough.' Those were the very words used to the doctor. But she could not be content till the child was christened; and our good vicar, taking the circumstances into consideration, consented to baptise it privately in her room. I went with him, and a more affecting scene I never witnessed. You know how beautiful she was, and as she lay there in her bed, propped up by pillows, with her dark hair floating about her shoulders, with her dark eyes fixed upon the child she was so soon to leave, she formed a picture such as I never beheld, and can never forget. Her piteous looks went to my heart."

Here the old man paused to brush away a tear.

"How was the child named?" asked Sir Hugh, in as firm a tone as he could command.

"Clarence," replied Moulscombe. "His mother named him. After the ceremony was over, and the exhortation pronounced, we all left the room, except the vicar, who remained with the poor dying lady,

being anxious to prepare her for her end. She must have unburdened an afflicted heart to him, and told him a most sorrowful tale, for he appeared deeply moved. He prayed long by her side, administered the last rites, and received her latest breath. She died in peace."

"Is Mr. Fairbanks still alive?" inquired Sir Hugh, after another pause.

"Alas! no, sir," replied Moulscombe. "We lost him more than ten years ago. He was a good man, and regretted by all. I have little more to add, gentlemen. The poor lady was buried in the spot she had selected for a grave. I mentioned the circumstance to Mr. Fairbanks, and he took care that her wish should be complied with."

"And now what of her child?" asked Sir Hugh.

"I can tell you little about the child, sir," replied Moulscombe. "It was looked after by old Margaret Leigh, who had it nursed by a labouring man's wife. Mr. Fairbanks often urged the old woman to take the infant to its father's brother, as he knew she was acquainted with his name, though Mr. Fairbanks himself was ignorant of it; but he could not prevail upon her to do so, and at last she disappeared, taking the infant with her. That is all I have to relate, gentlemen."

For a minute or two there was a profound silence. Both listeners were too much moved by the

old man's simple story to speak. At last, Sir Hugh arose, and said,

"Show me the poor lady's grave."

"Readily, sir," replied Moulscombe.

They then went forth into the churchyard.

"The grave is yonder — not far from that tree," said Moulscombe, perceiving from Sir Hugh's manner that he did not desire to be attended. "You will easily find it."

At a sign from the baronet, Mainwaring remained with the old clerk, and Sir Hugh walked on alone.

The resting-place of her he had loved best was soon discovered. It was a retired spot, shaded and sheltered by tall trees, and the plain stone bore this simple inscription, already nearly obliterated by lichens:

ANICE

Neither surname nor date. This had been done in accordance with her own last injunctions, faithfully carried out by old Margaret Leigh.

As Sir Hugh stood by the lowly tomb his heart smote him, and he groaned aloud.

"It was my hand — mine — that brought her to this early grave!" he ejaculated. "She was my victim as well as my brother, and her death, like his, lies at my door. Yet why should I bewail her fate? She is at peace. She has rejoined him she

loved. Would I were likewise at rest! Why do I linger on earth merely to endure anguish like the present — a prey to ceaseless remorse? To me the grave would be truly a refuge. Yet, though I long for death, I shrink from self-destruction, and will never, while reason remains to me, rush unsummoned into the presence of my Maker. Grievous though the burden of existence may be, I will bear it till it shall please Heaven to release me from my sufferings. Oh! forgive me, Amice!" he passionately exclaimed. "You can now read my inmost heart, and know how deeply I suffer. Long ere this, I would have made reparation for the wrong I have committed, but the power of doing so has been withheld from me. There is yet time for atonement — there is yet time to cleanse my soul from its stains. Heaven has heard my prayer, and has mercifully delayed the stroke till the work can be achieved. The history which was involved in darkness has been made clear. The child whom I vowed to make my heir, and whose birth even was unknown to me, has been found. Every link in the chain of evidence required has been supplied. Step by step have I advanced till I have come to this spot."

Then, kneeling down by the grave, he exclaimed:

"Hear me, injured saint, while I renew the vow I made to thee in life! Thy son, whom I have just discovered, shall be my son. All my possessions

shall be his possessions, and I feel that it will not be long ere he will inherit them. This I swear. Nor will I rest till my oath shall be fulfilled. Intercede for me, I implore thee, at the throne of Mercy, so that my sins may be forgiven me, and I may depart in peace."

With a bosom somewhat lightened, he arose from his kneeling posture, but he could not tear himself from the spot. His thoughts wandered back to the past, and his imagination became so strongly excited, that he fancied that she who lay beneath rose before him in all her former beauty — nay, in more than earthly beauty. All traces of sadness which her features wore when he last beheld her in life had disappeared, and given place to a bright celestial smile. Thus did fancy cheat him into the belief that he held momentary communion with the departed, and that the benign smile with which she regarded him proved he was forgiven.

The vision faded away, and would not be recalled by any effort, but he still lingered, as if spell-bound, on the spot, and would not have moved if he had not heard footsteps approaching, while a cough announced Mainwaring.

The old gentleman, though respecting his friend's feelings, thought that an hour's indulgence of grief was quite long enough — rather too long, indeed! Besides, it was very cold, and had become nearly dark; so, getting tired of waiting, he ventured, not

without some misgiving, to disturb the baronet. Sir Hugh, however, manifested no displeasure, but inquired for Moulscombe, whom he did not see, and learnt that the old man had been gone some time.

"I'm sorry for it," remarked the baronet. "I must find him before I leave."

The old clerk spared him the trouble of search, for he reappeared as they quitted the churchyard, and received a very handsome gratuity.

"It may gratify you, Mr. Moulscombe," said the baronet, "to learn that the son of the poor lady about whom I have been inquiring is alive and well, and has grown into a very fine young man."

"I'm heartily glad to hear it, sir," rejoined the old clerk. "And so he's grown into a young man, eh? Lord bless me! it seems only the other day that he was a babby. How time flies, to be sure! Well, if the young gentleman be any connexion of yours, sir, as I reckon he must be from the interest you take in his poor mother, he'll be well off."

"He is my nephew," replied Sir Hugh.

"Then he's got a very liberal uncle, that's all I can say," rejoined the old clerk.

"There you're right, Moulscombe — there you're right," said Mainwaring.

"Perhaps I may require to see you again," said Sir Hugh to the clerk.

"I shall be proud to attend to you, sir," replied the old man, "and will procure copies of the regis-

ters of birth of child and death of mother should you require them."

"Have them ready," rejoined Sir Hugh. "Good evening."

As they walked across the green, Mainwaring remarked to Sir Hugh,

"Now that your inquiries have so successfully terminated, and proofs of my young friend's birth have been obtained, I presume you mean to recognise him as a member of your family?"

"Most certainly," replied the baronet. "Henceforth he is Clarence Chetwynd."

"Bravo! this is worthy of you! this is noble!" exclaimed Mainwaring. "From what I have seen of him, I am satisfied your nephew will do you credit. But what will Lucetta say to her new cousin?"

"No more on that subject," rejoined Sir Hugh, sharply.

So no more was said, and they got into the fly, and drove back.

Very brilliant looked Brighton, as they approached it, with its three miles of gas-lamps distinctly marking the outline of the cliffs, and extending from Hove to Kemp Town; and very gay looked the well-lighted shops, as they entered the town. Even at that hour there was considerable stir on the West Cliff, and no end of carriages, broughams, and flys dashed past, conveying their occupants to dinner-

parties in Brunswick-terrace, Brunswick-square, and thereabouts. At last, to Mainwaring's infinite delight, they reached the Old Ship.

Some amends was made the old gentleman for the toils and troubles of the day by a capital dinner — oyster soup, a Dublin Bay haddock, a loin of Southdown mutton, and a blackcock. Mr. Bacon was as good as his word, and gave him an admirable bottle of '34 port. It was pleasant to witness the old gourmet's satisfaction as he held up his glass to the light, and noted the ruby glow of the wine; pleasanter still, to witness his extraordinary enjoyment as he slowly sipped it. We regret to add, however, that, failing to engage his companion in converse, he fell asleep in his armchair near the fire, and when he awoke Sir Hugh had retired. So he betook himself to bed.

VI.

Father and Daughter.

DURING breakfast next morning, Mainwaring questioned Sir Hugh as to his plans for the day, and learnt that he intended to return forthwith to Old Court. But the baronet added that, before leaving, he should call upon his daughter; with which piece of information the old gentleman was well pleased.

Mainwaring accompanied Sir Hugh to Adelaide-crescent, where, as we have previously mentioned, Lady Danvers resided, but he left him at the door of the house, and returned by the promenade near the beach, greatly amused by all he beheld, for the morning was fine, and the cliff already crowded.

Meanwhile, a servant out of livery had opened the door, and quite started on beholding Sir Hugh. Lady Danvers, it appeared, had not quite finished breakfast, but Miss Chetwynd was up-stairs in her own room, so Sir Hugh was ushered into the spacious and sumptuously furnished dining-room, where he found her ladyship. If the butler had been astonished at the sight of Sir Hugh, Lady Danvers was much more so. She could scarcely repress a cry of surprise. However, she professed to be enchanted to see him.

"How kind of you to come, Sir Hugh — how extremely kind!" she exclaimed. "Lucetta will, indeed, be delighted — and surprised too, for she doesn't in the least expect you. I really think I ought to prepare her."

"On no account," said Sir Hugh.

"Ah! I understand," cried her ladyship. "You desire to give her an agreeable surprise. Well then, Hardman," she added to the butler, "merely let Miss Chetwynd know that I wish to see her presently. Say nothing about Sir Hugh."

The butler bowed and retired.

"Have you breakfasted, Sir Hugh?" continued her ladyship, as soon as they were alone. "Do take a cup of tea. You're not looking quite so well as I could wish to see you," she remarked, in a tone of affected concern — "rather pale and fatigued. I must repeat how very, very kind it is in you to come. So much better than writing. I know what an effort it must have been to you to leave home, and therefore appreciate your kindness. I hope you like Captain Fanshaw — nay, I am sure you do. He is a charming young man, and eligible in all respects. Very well he is so, for he has contrived to win Lucetta's affections. You will laugh when I tell you she had two other offers on the same night that Captain Fanshaw proposed. One of them was from young March Ripley, the banker. Entre nous, I almost wish he had been preferred, for his father

is a millionaire. But of course the young banker had no chance, since, as I have just remarked, Rainald Fanshaw was already lord and master of Lucetta's little heart. However, I mustn't appear in the slightest degree to disparage Rainald. He is all that could be desired, as you know — excellent position in society, excellent connexions, excellent prospects. Not an objection to be made, I believe, on any one point. I hope, Sir Hugh, that you entirely approve of what I have done for your daughter. I have taken the greatest care of her, and have never thought of looking out for a husband for her. But since the dear girl has appeared at Brighton she has created an unprecedented sensation, and been run after in an extraordinary manner. I would rather it had not been so, but I couldn't help it. I can't make her less captivating. And I really think it just as well that she should be married and off your hands, for she could scarcely have settled down again at Old Court."

"You think so?" remarked Sir Hugh, managing at last to get in a word.

"I am sure of it," replied her vivacious ladyship. "How could she, after the life she has led here. No, no — you must reconcile yourself to parting with her, Sir Hugh. The separation has come sooner than we expected — but what of that? Sooner or later it must have come. Lucetta is not a girl to be

moped up in a country-house. I've found that out. She likes society — likes gaiety and amusement."

"Somewhat too much, perhaps," remarked Sir Hugh.

"No, not at all too much for a person of her age. Lucetta hasn't a fault that I can discover. But I'm sure you couldn't bear to see her spirits droop, as they inevitably must if she returned to the old mansion, and therefore, on your own account, an early marriage is desirable."

At this juncture the door opened, and the object of their discourse came in, looking charming in her morning toilette.

"You have sent for me, aunty dear," she cried, stopping suddenly on perceiving a gentleman in the room.

"Who have we here, do you think, Lucetta?" said her ladyship.

"I see!" she cried, flying towards her father, who rose to embrace her.

"This is, indeed, a delightful surprise!" exclaimed Lucetta. "Dear, dear papa, how good of you to come!"

"I told him so, my love," remarked Lady Danvers. "But I'll leave you together. You have much to talk about, and I should only be in the way."

"But you haven't finished breakfast, aunty. We can go into the drawing-room."

"No, indeed you shan't," said Lady Danvers. "I've quite done. But, before I go, let me add one

word, Sir Hugh. We can make a most agreeable day for you. I know you don't care for society. But there are some charming people here — the Courcy Dormers — they reside at Kemp Town — whom we visit quite *en famille* — you must dine with them. They've the prettiest house imaginable, and keep the best cook in Brighton — a veritable *cordon bleu*. Among their other merits is an extraordinary fondness for Lucetta. On her account you must go. But you shall decide presently," she added, observing a shade gather on Sir Hugh's brow. "When your tête-à-tête is over you will find me in my boudoir. It's all right, my dear," she whispered to Lucetta as she quitted the room, and closed the door after her.

When they were left alone together, a sudden embarrassment took possession of both father and daughter. Neither spoke for a few moments. At last, Lucetta, who had stationed herself behind Sir Hugh's chair, looked over his shoulder and said,

"So you have seen Captain Fanshaw, papa. I hope you like him?"

"Yes, I have seen him," replied Sir Hugh. "I encountered him at Red-hill. I learnt his name — where he was going, and what about — but I did not make myself known to him."

"Dear me! what a pity!" exclaimed Lucetta. "So you let the poor fellow go on to Old Court! That was very cruel of you. And you say you

knew what took him there. That makes it still more cruel. You are perfectly barbarous, papa."

"I have contrived that he shall stay at Old Court till my return," said Sir Hugh. "I didn't wish to give him an answer till I had seen you."

"Oh, that was your motive! Then your conduct was not quite so bad as I supposed. You're quite sure he'll stay at Old Court till you get back? You return to-day, don't you? Rainald could manage to amuse himself for one night, I dare say. Under the circumstances, it's lucky that Major Trevor went with him. Did you see Major Trevor, papa? How very stupid in Rainald not to recognise you. I shall tell him so when I see him."

"You have caught some of your aunt's prolixity, Lucetta," said Sir Hugh. "Come and sit down beside me. I've a good deal to say."

"There," she replied, bringing a chair near him. "Now we'll settle it all nicely. Shan't we, papa?"

"You treat the matter very lightly, Lucetta," said Sir Hugh, gravely. "But it is really a very serious business."

"I don't see anything serious in it," she rejoined. "You have only to give your consent, and the thing is done. And you mean to consent, I'm sure," she added, in a coaxing tone, scarcely to be resisted. "You wouldn't break your daughter's heart."

"You almost make me think you haven't a heart

to break, Lucetta," rejoined Sir Hugh; "and it might perhaps be better for you if you had not."

"You'll make me very serious indeed, papa, if you talk so. I hoped Rainald would have spared me the necessity of this interview, and that, when I met you, it would only be to receive your sanction. I do not mean to trifle in a matter in which I am so deeply interested — but you know my manner, and will forgive me. Besides, you have always allowed me to talk to you as I please, and I presume on former indulgence. You sometimes look stern and cold, papa, when I know your heart is overflowing with tenderness. I look gayest, perhaps, when most inclined to be sad. And so I feel just now. But I *will* be gay, or affect to be gay, or else I shall cry outright."

"Nay, not so, my child," said Sir Hugh, taking her hand. "I was wrong to check your spirits. May you ever retain them. And so you really love Captain Fanshaw?"

"Yes, I really do love him, papa. And I hope I say so seriously enough."

"And you think he loves you?"

"Think, papa! I'm quite sure of it."

"I also must be quite sure. I shall put his sincerity to the test."

"Now you begin to alarm me, papa. What sort of test do you propose? Something formidable, I

imagine. However, Rainald's love will stand any ordeal."

"If his love can stand that to which I shall put it, I shall say it is sterling love, and that he deserves you," rejoined Sir Hugh.

"Now you are serious, I perceive, papa — perfectly serious. But why should you put Rainald's professions to such a severe test? Why can't you be satisfied if *I* believe him? I'm quite sure he is sincere. But you shall be convinced from his own lips. Oh, how I wish he had spoken to you at Redhill! Then all would have been settled so nicely, and this unpleasantness avoided."

"You are mistaken, my dear child. Had he spoken to me then, I tell you frankly I should have declined the offer."

"Oh no, papa, don't say so!"

"Lucetta," said Sir Hugh, regarding her with inexpressible tenderness, "it has been my chief study to make you happy, but I feel that I have imperfectly succeeded. My solitary mode of life is unsuited to you, and now that you must needs contrast it with gayer scenes and gayer people, Old Court will be unsupportable. I know this must be the case, for your aunt has just told me so, and I feel she has reason on her side. I had no right to expect that when you grew up and saw more of the world you could live for me alone, or that you could be content with so dull a home as I could offer you. My

moody disposition renders all society painful to me. I do not wonder, therefore, that you should be glad to exchange such a life as you have hitherto led, for a gayer and brighter existence. Nor am I selfish enough to wish to detain you. But in making the change, be sure you act judiciously. Do not rush from one extreme to the other. Because with me you are too dull, do not let your whole life be occupied by frivolous pursuits. I have somewhat mistaken your character. I thought your tastes and predilections different from what I find them. I thought you loved the country, liked country people, and were content with a mode of life in which, I really believe, most happiness is to be found. I ought to have known better, and have waited to see how your character would be developed by circumstances. I did not expect that my quiet country-girl would rush headlong into a vortex of dissipation."

"Now, dear papa," said Lucetta, looking at him so charmingly that he almost felt sorry for what he had said, "let me venture to say, in reply to your lecture, that I am still fond of the country, and love dear, dull — no, not dull — dear, delightful Old Court just as much as ever. As to you, sir, with your moody disposition, as you term it, though I never perceived any such moodiness, I won't say how much I love you. I am not so dreadfully dissipated as you imagine, and, to tell you the truth, am well-nigh surfeited with concerts, dinners, and

balls, and begin to sigh for the country, which you say — most improperly, sir — that I dislike.”

“But your aunt says differently ——”

“My aunt understands my character quite as like as you do, papa,” interrupted Lucetta. “You are neither of you quite right in your judgment of me — nor yet quite wrong. I certainly do enjoy society. I like a gay scene of any kind. I like pleasant people. Music enchants me, and therefore I like a concert. Dancing delights me, and therefore I dote upon a ball, and the more brilliant the ball the better I like it. Now, isn’t this natural? You know it is, you dear old cross-patch. But because I like concerts and balls, that is no reason why I shouldn’t like the country and quietude. Everything in its turn. There now, are you answered, sir? Do you begin to understand your daughter’s character a wee bit better than you did?”

“I fear you are grown too fond of admiration, Lucetta,” remarked Sir Hugh.

“Not too fond. I own that I like to be admired a little. What girl does not? My head, though none of the strongest, has not been turned by all the flattery I have received, for I fancy I can appreciate compliments at their right worth. I hope you don’t mean to imply that I have become a flirt, or I should be positively angry with you, for I detest that heartless character. I am frank with all — perhaps too frank. Men are so uncommonly vain, that if you

only talk to them civilly they fancy it encouragement, but I have always quickly undeceived those who so presumed. I never led any man to believe that I cared a pin's head about him. Yes, I must make one exception," she added, correcting herself.

"I am almost sorry you should have to make an exception," said her father.

"Why should you be sorry, papa?" she rejoined. "I should never have allowed myself to fall in love with Rainald Fanshaw if he had not been superior to the rest of his sex. He is high-spirited, generous, well-bred, and — and — devoted to me. As to his position, that is perfectly unexceptionable."

"Are you quite sure, Lucetta, that he has not offered you his hand because he believes you heiress of Old Court?"

"I am quite sure that Rainald's love for me is perfectly disinterested."

"You believe he loves you so well, that he would have proposed if you had no fortune?"

"I believe he would. But it is rather a puzzling question to answer. Every man, now-a-days, seems to expect a fortune."

"Even the disinterested," remarked Sir Hugh. "Well, we shall see by-and-by what Captain Fanshaw *does* expect."

"Is this the test you mean to put him to, papa?" inquired Lucetta, turning pale.

"I see you are uneasy, my child. You have some misgivings about your disinterested lover."

"Perhaps he may be disappointed, and think he has been misled."

"You have not misled him, Lucetta — nor your aunt, ha?"

"Neither of us have said a word to him on the subject."

"Then he cannot complain. If he has raised his expectations too highly, he has only himself to blame."

"But he may justly complain, papa, that I have always been regarded as an heiress. My aunt considered me so, and so represented me."

"Then your aunt it to blame. I shall take care to give Captain Fanshaw full explanation when he speaks to me."

"What is the meaning of this, papa?"

"It means, my child, that I may not be able to leave Old Court to you. Circumstances have arisen that may put it out of my power to do so, and I cannot promise Captain Fanshaw more than I can perform."

"Oh dear, papa, this is terrible!" exclaimed Lucetta. "But you shall not frighten me thus. I see it all. This is part of your scheme to test Rainald's affection."

Here they were interrupted by the entrance of Lady Danvers. Her intelligent ladyship saw at a

glance that something had gone wrong, and hastened towards her niece.

"What's the matter, Lucetta?" she inquired, anxiously.

"Nothing, aunty — nothing whatever," rejoined Lucetta, vainly struggling with her emotion.

"You can't deceive me. A great deal appears to be the matter. Where is Captain Fanshaw, Sir Hugh?"

"At Old Court," he replied. "I am going thither immediately to meet him."

"All is not settled, then?" cried her ladyship, in consternation.

"Nothing is settled," returned Sir Hugh. "Nothing can be settled till I have spoken to Captain Fanshaw. I have some preliminary explanations to give him."

"Preliminary! why, I thought the business had been fully discussed," cried Lady Danvers. "Everything you do is mysterious and unaccountable, Sir Hugh. Do tell me what it all means."

"I have not time now," he rejoined. "Lucetta will explain all to you. I am going back by an early train. I will write to you after I have seen Captain Fanshaw," he added, to his daughter. "Excuse me for hurrying away thus," he said to Lady Danvers. "I must go."

"Since you must, I won't attempt to detain you," said her ladyship, ringing the bell.

Bidding a hasty adieu to both ladies, Sir Hugh took his departure.

"Now, my dear child," said her ladyship, "pray tell me the meaning of this extraordinary occurrence. Has Sir Hugh taken leave of his senses?"

"I don't know, aunty," replied Lucetta; "but I'm very much afraid the match will be broken off. Our only chance of preventing such a dreadful consummation will be to go to Old Court."

"Go to Old Court!" exclaimed Lady Danvers. "Not for the world."

"Not to oblige me, dear aunty?" said Lucetta, with one of her irresistible looks. "Yes, you will."

"I cannot leave Brighton, with all its attractions, and go to that dismal old house, even to please you, Lucetta," replied her ladyship, in a half-yielding voice.

"Yes you will, aunty dear — yes you will. It will only be for a day."

"What good shall we do by going?" inquired Lady Danvers.

"That remains to be seen. It's the only chance. Papa has got some strange quixotic notion into his head about testing Rainald's affection."

"What nonsense! Just like him!" cried Lady Danvers. "If that's the case, I will go. A stop must be put to such folly."

"Oh, thank you, dear aunty — thank you!" cried Lucetta.

"Don't be uneasy, my love. I'll soon set the matter right," said Lady Danvers, kissing her.

Orders were then issued by her ladyship to the effect that immediate preparations should be made for the journey. But before these were completed her excitement had worn off, and she began to regret her hasty compliance with her niece's request. However, it was now too late to retract the promise she had given, and eventually she and Lucetta, attended by Hardman and a lady's-maid, drove to the station, and started for Old Court.

Full two hours before this, Sir Hugh and Mainwaring had set off in the same direction, and in a much quicker train.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK III.

CLARENCE CHETWYND.

I.

Mr. La Hogue makes a Disclosure to Clarence.

MANY hours did not elapse after Mr. La Hogue's arrival at Old Court, before he had visited almost every part of the premises, including the stables, and during his survey of the latter he satisfied Drax and his helpers that he was a very good judge of horseflesh. He also paid a visit to Mrs. Mansfield, who was by no means pleased with his free-and-easy manner, and quite shocked when he proposed to come and smoke a cigar in her room in the evening. However, she civilly declined the proposition, on the plea that she could not allow smoking, for the good old dame, though disliking his manner, was anxious not to give him offence. All the household were astonished by the gentleman's extraordinary assurance, and wondered what Sir Hugh would say to him when he came back. Poor old Jodrell began to be apprehensive that he should incur his master's displeasure by the step he had taken, but he comforted himself by reflecting that he had acted for the best. Besides being excessively familiar, Mr. La Hogue was very prying and inquisitive, and examined all the papers lying on the writing-table

in Sir Hugh's study. When Pigot went up-stairs with him, he asked the young man to show him Sir Hugh's bedroom, and the door being open, he marched in and gazed around as curiously as if he were taking an inventory of the furniture. An old desk in one corner particularly attracted his attention.

As will have been conjectured, Mr. La Hogue had a design upon Clarence — as we shall henceforth style that young gentleman, now that his right to the appellation is fully established — but he postponed the execution of the plan until after dinner. First satisfying himself that there was no one behind the large screen which was drawn round the table, he began:

"I've a few words to say to you on a very serious subject — no less than your father's murder. That is a very mysterious affair. There's more in it than has yet come out. A very important person, to whom no suspicion attaches, was the main actor in the terrible business. The murderer, I say, was a person of importance — a near relative of the victim."

"I can come to no other conclusion," rejoined Clarence, looking fixedly at his companion, "than that your dark suggestion refers to the master of this mansion."

"Ah! you fancy so, eh?" observed La Hogue.

"And therefore I dismiss it as improbable, almost

impossible," pursued Clarence. "Sir Hugh Chetwynd can never be guilty of so terrible a crime."

"You bring the accusation against him, not I," remarked La Hogue. "I never said he murdered his brother."

"Not directly, but you implied it," said Clarence.

"If you will draw such an inference from the few words I let fall, I cannot help it. You don't seem inclined to move in the matter, so we'll let the subject drop."

"No, you have gone too far. It cannot be dropped now," cried Clarence, vehemently. "I do not believe Sir Hugh can be guilty; but if I did, nothing should prevent me from bringing him to justice."

"Really, my dear boy, I must call you to order," remarked Mr. La Hogue. "Consider what you are saying, and where you are saying it. Recollect that Sir Hugh is your uncle — your nearest living relative — and that you are under his roof. Above all, recollect that your future prospects depend entirely on him."

"But you have hinted — more than hinted — that he is my father's murderer," rejoined Clarence. "I repeat, that I do not believe the foul charge; but were I satisfied of its truth, I would not screen him from the consequences of his crime, were he thrice my uncle. My father must, and shall be avenged."

"Very proper," said the imperturbable listener;

"but I will show you the best way of avenging him. Listen to me, my dear boy, and listen patiently. It is useless to excite yourself, because excitement answers no purpose. I can assist you to obtain money from your uncle, but nothing more. Vengeance is against my principles. Of course it will be necessary to alarm Sir Hugh, but this you may leave to me. Have I not said enough? You must be monstrous slow if you don't comprehend me."

"I see plainly what you mean," cried Clarence, scarcely able to conceal his disgust. "But what proofs have you of the truth of your assertion?"

"Proofs are unnecessary. A few words from me will suffice to produce the desired effect on Sir Hugh, and compel him to agree to our terms."

The young man shuddered, for he felt, from the expression of La Hogue's face, that that unscrupulous personage believed Sir Hugh to be completely in his power.

"You pretend to have been my father's friend," he said, at length; "but how comes it, if you are in possession of this terrible secret connected with his fate, that you have kept silence so long?"

"I do not feel called upon to explain the cause of my silence," said La Hogue, "but I had no particular motive for revealing the secret. I have no grudge against your uncle. But I have a hold upon him — a tremendous hold — and must turn it to account. I had fixed with myself the sum I in-

tended to demand. I shall double it, and give half to you. You look indignant, but you ought really to be obliged to me for procuring you a fortune. Your father was a deuced knowing fellow, and never threw away a chance. He would always make a bargain where a bargain was practicable, and saw in a moment what line of conduct would pay best. He might have thought revenge sweet, but he thought money a great deal sweeter. And in my own opinion that was a very sensible way of viewing things. An important secret is very valuable to its possessor, and if my sharp-witted friend, Clarence Chetwynd, had had such a secret as this in his keeping, he would have made the most of it, you may depend. Remember, my dear boy, I knew him well."

"Answer me one question, sir," said Clarence. "Was my father on bad terms with his brother?"

"On very bad terms, and I'll tell you why. Your father lived fast — spent a great deal — and Sir Hugh had to pay his debts more than once. Well, a brother might do this and get over the annoyance, but your father mortally offended Sir Hugh by supplanting him in the affections of a lady — of your mother, in short."

"Was Sir Hugh attached to her?" demanded Charence.

"He would have married her if his brother had not been in the way," replied La Hogue.

"This, then, was the motive for the dreadful deed?" cried Clarence, astounded.

"Now you begin to see it. But don't be down-cast. Take a glass of claret, and cheer up. No use in fretting about a matter that occurred before you were born. Nothing we can say or do will bring your worthy father to life again, but he has left you a nice little legacy — a nice little legacy, my boy — which I, as his executor, will take care shall be duly paid by your uncle. Don't be foolish enough to interfere with the testator's intentions. Place the matter in my hands, and as soon as your uncle comes back I'll arrange it to your entire satisfaction."

Clarence made no reply, and seemed completely overcome by painful emotions.

"Well, we won't say any more on the subject to-night," said La Hogue, feeling certain he had produced the desired effect. "Very likely Sir Hugh may return to-morrow, but let him come back when he will, he shall find us prepared. Rest quite easy as to the result. Your fortune is made, my dear boy — and so is mine," he added to himself. "This claret is deuced good, but I've had enough of it. I'll go and smoke a cigar on the terrace. Will you come? — No? Then adieu, for the moment."

So saying, he quitted the dining-room. In the entrance-hall he encountered Jodrell and Pigot, who

were bringing in coffee, so he stopped for a moment to help himself, and then passed out into the garden, where he remained for nearly an hour, pacing to and fro on the terrace.

When he re-entered the house, he found that Clarence had retired for the night, and, not knowing exactly what to do with himself, determined to follow the young man's example.

Previously, however, to ascending the grand staircase, he accepted Jodrell's offer of a glass of soda and brandy.

II.

A Mysterious Occurrence.

FAIN would Clarence have disbelieved the revelation made to him, but he felt there must be truth in it, or La Hogue would never have ventured to cast such a terrible imputation on Sir Hugh. Neither, if Sir Hugh were guiltless, would the plan of intimidation be successful.

Startling and improbable as was the statement — unworthy of credit as appeared the accuser — Clarence nevertheless believed the charge, for Sir Hugh's solitary life and moody fits, of which he had heard, seemed to proclaim that the unhappy man had a heavy weight upon his soul. That no suspicion had fallen upon him of his connexion with the tragical affair might be accounted for in many ways. Perhaps he had already purchased La Hogue's silence, and the villain had returned, at a most opportune moment, to claim a further reward, and sought to increase his demands by linking him in the plan. It might be so.

While thinking over the accidental meeting with Sir Hugh, Clarence began to persuade himself that the baronet's strange and startled looks, which had surprised him at the time, evidenced his guilt. And

Sir Hugh's subsequent conduct, otherwise inexplicable, tended to confirm the idea. Why had he shunned him throughout the day of his arrival, except that his presence was unsupportable?

Not for a moment did Clarence dream of becoming a party to the infamous scheme proposed by La Hogue, but he felt the necessity of caution while dealing with so unscrupulous a person.

The position in which the young man was placed was beset with difficulties, and, on whichever side he turned, they rose before him. Impressed with the idea that a stern duty was imposed upon him, and that he ought to be inflexible in its discharge, he yet felt unequal to the formidable task. To undertake it he must harden his heart — check all natural feelings — disgrace a proud and honourable family — and for ever destroy the peace of her who owed her being to Sir Hugh.

Could he do this? Could he rise up as an inexorable avenger and strike a terrible blow, the results of which must be fatal to the happiness of one in whom he was already deeply interested? Could he destroy her father?

And yet his own father must be avenged. He could not suffer the murderer to escape.

Occupied by such thoughts, he remained seated in an arm-chair by the fireside. More than once he had replenished the andirons with logs of wood taken from a basket standing near the mantelpiece, and the

flames for a time gave a cheerful air to the sombre room. At last, Nature asserted her sway, and he fell asleep. How long he slumbered he could not tell, but he was aroused by the opening of the door. It was opened very cautiously, but nevertheless the sound disturbed him. His taper was still burning, but it was placed at the farther end of the room, and gave a dim light, and the logs had burnt down to ashes. He fancied he saw some one look into the room, but the figure instantly disappeared, and the door was closed.

As soon as he could collect his senses he went out to ascertain who was the intruder. It was a bright moonlight night, and every object was clearly distinguishable in the corridor. But no one was there. His room adjoined that of Sir Hugh, and it occurred to him to go in. The door was fastened. He had every reason to believe the room unoccupied, but as he listened he felt convinced that some one was moving about inside. Resolved to satisfy himself on this point, he tapped at the door, but no answer was returned, and the noise instantly ceased. He knocked again yet more loudly, and called out. Still no answer was returned, and all remained perfectly quiet. Suddenly recollecting that Sir Hugh's dressing-room communicated with the bed-chamber, he flew to the latter, and meeting with no obstruction, entered it. The window-curtains were undrawn, and the chamber was flooded with moonlight,

and appeared entirely deserted. There stood the old armoire, with the portrait on which he had gazed in the morning reared against the table. No living thing met his eye.

Casting a hasty look around, he then went to the side-door. It was fastened. Again he knocked, but with the same result as before, and after waiting for a minute or two, he returned to his own room.

Puzzled by the occurrence, and not altogether satisfied, he was considering whether to retire to rest or keep watch, when his door, which was left ajar, was opened, and Jodrell came in with a lighted candle. The old butler, who did not look more than half awakened, had only partially huddled on his clothes, and presented a very grotesque appearance in his tall cotton nightcap.

"What! not a-bed, sir?" he cried. "Why, it's past two o'clock. Nothing the matter, I hope?"

"Were you here just now, Jodrell?" asked Clarence.

"Here!" exclaimed the butler, staring. "Lord bless you! no. I'm only just out of my warm bed. Hearing a noise below, I came down to see what caused it."

"You heard me knocking at Sir Hugh's door," replied Clarence. "There's somebody in the room — somebody locked in — and the person came to my room first."

"There ought not to be any one in Sir Hugh's room," cried Jodrell, now fully awakened. "I must find out who's there instantly."

"I'll go with you," replied Clarence.

So they sallied forth, each provided with a candle. Sir Hugh's room was but a few steps off, and on arriving at it, to Clarence's great surprise the door instantly yielded to Jodrell's touch, and they both went in. No one was in the room, and there was no appearance of any one having been there.

"You must have been mistaken, sir," remarked the butler.

"I could not have been mistaken," rejoined Clarence. "The door was certainly locked, and so was the side-door."

Jodrell examined the door in question, and finding it unfastened like the other, shook his head as sagaciously as Lord Burleigh. They then proceeded to search the room, looking behind the heavy curtains of the old oak bedstead, under the bed, behind the window-curtains, into the closets; looking everywhere, in short, where it was possible for a person to be concealed, but without making any discovery.

"Well, sir," said Jodrell, with a comical expression, "if you had gone to bed, I should say you had been dreaming."

"I have been sleeping in my chair," replied the young man, "and I may have fancied that some one looked into my room, but I could not have been

mistaken about the doors. They were both locked a few minutes ago."

Just then, a cough announced that some one was outside, and immediately afterwards Mr. La Hogue entered, bearing a light, and imperfectly costumed in a pair of loose Turkish trousers, with slippers attached to them.

"What's the row?" he cried, with a yawn. "Why have you disturbed me from my peaceful slumbers? I thought robbers must be breaking into the house."

"Robbers may have broken in, sir, only we can't find 'em," replied Jodrell. "There have been mysterious noises in this room, and the doors have been locked inside."

"Locked inside, eh? — then how the deuce did you get in? Is the room haunted?"

"I don't know," replied Jodrell. "It's Sir Hugh's room."

"The ghosts must have taken advantage of his absence to visit their old quarters," said La Hogue. "When he's at home, he frightens 'em away. But as I don't like their company, I shall be off. I must have an hour's extra sleep in the morning," he added with a tremendous yawn. "Good night." With this he departed, and made his way back to his own room, which, we may presume, he had just quitted.

"I'll lock up the room now, at any rate, and take the keys with me," said Jodrell. "Ghosts or

no ghosts, they shall remain here till morning, unless they can get through the keyhole."

This done, he attended Clarence to his room, and then bade him respectfully good-night. Though by no means satisfied, the young man postponed all further reflection till the morrow, and shortly afterwards sought his pillow.

III.

A Telegram from Lucetta.

Nothing further occurred during the night to alarm the inmates of Old Court, and when Jodrell and Mrs. Mansfield examined Sir Hugh's room next morning, they could not discover that anything had been disturbed in it.

Notwithstanding his short allowance of sleep, Clarence arose early, and wishing to have as little as possible of Mr. La Hogue's company, took breakfast with Mrs. Mansfield, for whom, as we have intimated, he had conceived an almost filial regard. Gladly would he have made her his confidante, and asked her advice, but this being impossible, he contented himself with talking to her about Sir Hugh, and the description she gave of the baronet's mode of life convinced him that the unhappy man was suffering from the pangs of remorse.

"Ah! my dear," she said, quite unconscious that she was confirming her hearer's suspicions, "Sir Hugh has been a changed man ever since your poor father's death. He might reproach himself for some unkindness shown to his brother — I can't say, though his manner looked like it — but he couldn't bear to hear Clarence's name mentioned, and be-

came liable to terrible fits of despondency. It is true that, during my poor lady's lifetime, he got rid in some degree of his melancholy; but even then he was far from happy."

"I suppose he is fond of his daughter?" inquired Clarence.

"Fond of her! he dotes upon her. And well he may, for there isn't her match in all England. Talking of her, I'll show you a letter which I received only a few days ago. She constantly writes to me. Here it is," she added, after rummaging her capacious pocket. "She calls me by a pet name, which she has used ever since she was a child. You may, perhaps, think she writes too freely — but it's excusable, for I was her nurse."

On opening the letter, Clarence was struck with the beauty of the handwriting. He then read as follows:

"Old Goody will think I have quite forgotten her. But the darling old creature will be quite wrong. Were I to tell you all I have been doing, I must send a letter longer than you would have patience to read, or than I could find time to write, so I must content myself with saying that I have been excessively gay, and have been to dinners, concerts, and balls innumerable. Sometimes to as many as four balls in one night. Are you not shocked, Goody? To tell you the truth, I did find this rather

too much of a good thing. But the parties at Brighton are very agreeable — especially those given by the Courcy Dormers, which are really splendid. They do everything in the Russian style. I shall astonish you by describing their concerts and suppers when I come back. What do you think, darling Old Goody? I went out the other day with the South-down fox-hounds, and brought away the brush. I mean to hang it up in the entrance-hall at Old Court as a trophy. Well, now, I dare say you will ask how I like Brighton. I'll tell you. It's a charming place for a couple of months, but I don't desire to live here. I prefer our dull Old Court. However, it is very pleasant to ride and drive upon the cliffs — to see so many brilliant equipages — and to meet hundreds of people whom one knows; and I do so enjoy a gallop on the downs.

“There, I don't think I have anything more to tell you. Oh! yes, the 40th Hussars are here, though I don't suppose the information will interest you much. But the officers are very agreeable, and make a great addition to our balls and parties. In fact, I don't know what we should do without them, for most of the other men one meets are tiresome and insipid. Two in particular — a Mr. March Ripley, and a Mr. Gerard Hunsdon, who pester me with their attentions — are dreadful plagues. They form a perfect contrast in looks and manner to Captain Rainald Fanshaw, one of the officers I have al-

luded to, whose attentions are rather marked, and whom I don't find altogether disagreeable. Captain F. has a very distinguished appearance, and is certainly the most agreeable person I have met. He is the only son of Sir Nevil Fanshaw, Bart.

"Now I have told you all, or nearly all. So adieu, dearest old Goody! Your affectionate

"LUCETTA.

"P.S. — Don't imagine that Captain R. F. has produced any decided impression upon me. I think him very handsome and very agreeable — that's all. I shall meet him to-night at the Capenhursts' ball, and to-morrow at the Courcy Dormers'. Once more, adieu!"

The concluding portion of the letter gave Clarence exquisite pain, and he exclaimed,

"It is plain this Captain Fanshaw has gained her affections."

"I hope not, my dear," replied Mrs. Mansfield. "She is pleased with him, no doubt, but ——"

"She is in love with him, I tell you," interrupted Clarence. "This is a bitter disappointment to me, for I will own to you that the image of my lovely cousin has haunted me ever since I first gazed upon her portrait. Yet what right have I to complain? She has never seen me, and is not even aware of my existence. I have allowed myself to indulge

in an idle dream about her, and am now rudely awakened."

"I shall be very sorry if your notion should prove correct, my dear," said Mrs. Mansfield. "Captain Fanshaw may be all your cousin Lucetta represents him, but I am sure I shall never like him."

"Whatever he may be, it is certain he has won her heart," sighed Clarence.

"I won't believe it," cried the old housekeeper. "She has only written this silly nonsense to make me laugh. And I do laugh at it."

But her looks contradicted the assertion, for she appeared uncommonly serious.

Just at this moment Pigot entered the room with a letter.

"A telegraphic message for you, ma'am," he said. "Please to sign the receipt for the messenger."

Mrs. Mansfield having complied, the footman departed, and the old dame, having put on her spectacles and opened the letter, cried out,

"Bless me! it's from Lucetta."

The despatch was thus worded:

"FROM MISS CHETWYND

TO MRS. MANSFIELD,

WITH SIR HUGH CHETWYND, BART.,

OLD COURT HOUSE, KENT.

"R. F. will come to see papa to-day. Prepare."

"R.F.! That must be the odious Captain Rainald Fanshaw himself," cried Mrs. Mansfield, dropping the despatch, which Clarence picked up. "What business can he have with Sir Hugh, I wonder?"

"He can only have one business," rejoined Clarence, sadly. "This brief message speaks volumes. Coupling these few words with Lucetta's letter, you are given to understand that Captain Fanshaw has been accepted by her, and is coming hither to ask her father's consent to their marriage. That's the explanation," he added, bitterly.

"Oh dear! oh dear! I shall go distracted!" exclaimed Mrs. Mansfield. "Such a nice plan as I had formed — and to have it frustrated! What a lucky thing Sir Hugh is not at home."

"He may return before Captain Fanshaw arrives," remarked Clarence. "Besides, his absence will only cause a little delay. All my hopes are destroyed."

"Don't say so," cried the good old dame. "Something unexpected may turn up. Sir Hugh may refuse his consent — and, indeed, that's not at all improbable."

"But if she loves this Captain Fanshaw, I must think of her no more," said Clarence. "I ought never to have aspired to her even in thought, and am properly punished for my presumption."

"Presumption, indeed! You deserve her a great

deal better than the captain. I shan't be able to be decently civil to him when he comes."

At this moment Jodrell entered the room, and, addressing Clarence, said,

"Mr. La Hogue is just come down to breakfast, sir, and is inquiring for you."

"I don't want to see him," replied the young man. "Captain Fanshaw ought not to find that person here," he added, significantly, to the housekeeper. "Can't you give him a hint to depart, Jodrell?"

"Not I, sir," rejoined the butler. "It would require a pretty strong hint, I suspect, to make him go. But who is the gentleman you were speaking of — Captain Fanshaw? I never heard of him."

"You'll hear enough about him presently," rejoined Clarence. "But, I repeat, he must not meet Mr. La Hogue."

"If the captain is coming here, I don't see how a meeting is to be avoided, sir," said Jodrell, "for it's quite certain Mr. La Hogue won't remain in the background."

"It must be managed, even if you give him offence," said Clarence. "Mrs. Mansfield will tell you more about Captain Fanshaw. I am going out into the park."

So saying, he hastily quitted the room, leaving the astounded butler to ask for some explanation from Mrs. Mansfield.

IV.

Mr. La Hogue manages to make Acquaintance with Captain Fanshaw and Major Trevor.

MR. LA HOGUE had gone very leisurely through his breakfast, and was leaning back indolently in an easy-chair, thinking how delightful a cabana would be, but not venturing to indulge in one there, when Jodrell entered, and as he hobbled towards him, the old butler's countenance betokened that he had something to communicate. Noticing this, Mr. La Hogue inquired, with some appearance of interest, whether he had heard from Sir Hugh. The butler replied in the negative. A telegraphic message, however, had been received from Miss Chetwynd, announcing that a visitor might be expected in the course of the day. Mr. La Hogue was curious to know who the visitor could be, and learnt that it was Captain Fanshaw, of the 40th Hussars, who was coming from Brighton.

"I shall be delighted to see Captain Fanshaw," said La Hogue. "You have no idea what brings him here, Jodrell?"

"Not the slightest, sir. His visit is quite unexpected. But I think, sir, that Sir Hugh will hardly like to find you here as well. He dislikes much company."

"Don't trouble yourself about me, Jodrell. I have made up my mind to stay, and stay I shall. Attend to your young lady's recommendation, and do the best you can for the captain. Now what's your own opinion about him, Jodrell? — don't you fancy he's a suitor — ha?"

"I never venture to have an opinion on such points, sir."

"Ten to one he is. I'll soon settle the point when he arrives."

"Really, sir, if you'll allow me — I think you'd much better pack off after luncheon."

"Pack off, you impertinent rascal. Mind your own business. Take care we have a good dinner. By-the-by, have you found out the cause of the disturbance last night? Something supernatural — eh?"

"I don't know what to think of it," replied the butler.

"But I do," rejoined La Hogue. "You don't suppose I'm such an ass as to believe in ghosts; but I *do* believe in somnambulism. Mr. Chetwynd must have been walking in his sleep. No other explanation is possible. If you want to keep him quiet, I would recommend you to lock him in his room to-night."

"Shall I lock your door as well, sir?" inquired Jodrell, dryly.

"In my case the precaution is unnecessary. I

don't walk in my sleep. Indeed, I walk as little as I can, at any time. And that reminds me that I shall ride to-day — after luncheon. Sir Hugh's horses want exercise — so do I. Tell Mr. Chetwynd, when he comes in, that I hope he'll ride with me."

The butler promised compliance, but his manner seemed to intimate that the proposition would very likely be declined. And so it turned out.

Mr. La Hogue spent the interval between breakfast and luncheon in the stables, for which part of the establishment he evinced a great predilection, and where he seemed to be quite at home. Seated upon a corn-bin, he chatted familiarly with Drax, critically examined the horses, smoked several cigars, admired a couple of bull-terrier pups belonging to the coachman, and having gained an appetite in this way, went back to luncheon. Again Clarence did not make his appearance. He had not returned from his walk in the park, Jodrell asserted — but the sly old fellow knew better. Mr. La Hogue looked surprised, and rather vexed, but he sat down to luncheon by himself, and did tolerably well. He had ordered horses to be ready for himself and the young gentleman at half-past two, and a couple of excellent hacks were brought round at that hour; but as Clarence did not turn up, he was obliged to set off with no other company beyond that of a groom.

"He sits a horse uncommon well, that 'ere

lively blade," remarked Drax to Jodrell, as they stood together at the door looking after him "and he knows quite as much about horses as I do myself. He's werry agreeable and conversable, I must say."

"I wish we were rid of him, Drax," rejoined Jodrell. "There'll be a pretty to-do, I expect, when Sir Hugh returns."

"Why didn't our young gent ride wi' him?" asked the coachman.

"'Cos he don't like him, that's why, Drax," replied the butler.

"Well, I *do* like him; he makes hisself so remarkable pleasant," replied the coachman. And he trotted off to the stable.

Mr. La Hogue enjoyed his ride very much, but only accomplished a few miles, for the ground being frosty and hard, he could not go fast with safety, so, having reached an eminence crowned by a windmill which he had fixed as his limit, he turned back. When he was within a mile of the park, and walking his horse slowly along, he heard the sound of wheels behind, and, looking back, perceived a small open phaeton, in which two gentlemen were seated.

From the military appearance of these gentlemen he entertained no doubt whatever that one of them was Captain Fanshaw, and determined to make his acquaintance without loss of time. Accordingly, he

halted to let the phaeton come up. Seeing our free-and-easy friend mounted on a remarkably handsome bay horse, and attended by a groom, the two officers naturally supposed him to be a gentleman. Besides, Mr. La Hogue looked much better on horseback than in any other position, and his grey French paletot, tight blue trousers, and Parisian hat, gave him rather a stylish air. Motioning the driver to stop, and politely raising his hat as he approached the phaeton, La Hogue inquired whether one of the gentlemen was not Captain Fanshaw.

"I am Captain Fanshaw, sir," replied Rainald, removing a cigar from his lips, and returning La Hogue's salute.

"I felt quite certain of it," said La Hogue, "and have therefore taken the liberty of addressing you. I am staying at Old Court, whither, I conclude, you are bound, and where you are expected. Allow me to introduce myself to you as Mr. Vandeleur La Hogue."

"Upon my honour, Mr. La Hogue, you quite astonish me," replied Rainald. "I had no idea I was expected. My brother-officer, Major Trevor."

Salutes were then exchanged, and Rainald continued:

"Now do tell me, my good sir, how it comes to pass that I am expected at Old Court?"

"The explanation is very simple, captain," re-

plied La Hogue, smiling. "A telegraphic message has been received from Miss Chetwynd."

La Hogue noticed the look that passed between the two officers, and felt that his conjecture as to the captain's errand was correct.

"Is Sir Hugh Chetwynd at home, may I inquire, Mr. La Hogue?" said Rainald.

"He is not," replied the personage addressed, "but he may return at any moment."

"'Twas he we met at Red-hill! I told you so," observed Rainald to the major.

"You have seen him, then?" cried La Hogue.

"Accidentally," replied Captain Fanshaw. "And I am able to tell you that he is gone to Brighton, and will not be back till to-morrow."

"I hope you will stay till then," said La Hogue. "You won't find the place very lively, but we'll do our best to amuse you."

"Oh yes, we'll stay!" rejoined Rainald.

The phaeton moved slowly on, and Mr. La Hogue kept near it, talking to the officers.

"Are there any guests at the house just now?" inquired Major Trevor, who, judging from the specimen before him, began to think Mainwaring's description of the place might be correct after all.

"Only myself and Sir Hugh's nephew," replied La Hogue.

"His nephew!" exclaimed Captain Fanshaw,

surprised. "I was not aware that Sir Hugh had a nephew."

"Sir Hugh was not aware of it himself two days ago," rejoined La Hogue, laughing.

And he then proceeded to narrate, in his own way, all the particulars connected with Clarence that had come to his knowledge, increasing the wonderment of both his listeners by the singular details he gave them.

"Clarence has not yet been formally acknowledged by Sir Hugh as his nephew, but he will be so immediately, I suppose," he said, in conclusion. "He is a devilish good-looking young fellow, as I am sure you will admit — the image of his father, my old friend, Captain Chetwynd."

"I am curious to see him," replied Rainald. "Upon my soul, this is a very curious story you have told us — quite a romance. No doubt Sir Hugh was about this business when we met him at Red-hill with Mr. Mainwaring," he observed to the major.

By this time they had reached the park gates, and the driver of the phaeton, on entering the noble domain, increased his speed, and left Mr. La Hogue behind; but that gentleman came up again presently, and renewed the conversation, rather to the annoyance of Rainald, who had no sooner caught sight of the picturesque old mansion, than he was seized with a sentimental fit. Meantime, the groom had ridden

on to announce the visitors, so that on their arrival they found the principal members of the household waiting at the door to receive them.

"Mr. Jodrell, I suppose," said Rainald, as the old butler advanced with Pigot. "I have a letter for you."

"From Sir Hugh, I perceive," replied Jodrell. "Excuse me, sir," he added, opening the letter. "Ah! I see, he merely recommends me to pay every attention to Captain Fanshaw — yourself, I presume, sir," bowing, "and Major Trevor," bowing again, "who will remain till his return. Rely upon it, gentlemen, I'll do my best to carry out my master's orders."

The officers then alighted, and Rainald, having paid the driver of the phaeton and dismissed him, threw his overcoat to Pigot, but, instead of entering the house at once, he walked to a short distance along the broad gravel drive to gaze at the picturesque façade, and indulge his romantic fancies.

"And this, then, is the house in which she has dwelt!" he mentally ejaculated. "A fine old place — exactly what she described it — and I trust we shall pass away many years of happiness beneath its roof. But what a strange story is that I have just heard of the newly discovered nephew! I can't get it out of my head. I wonder how I shall like our new cousin. Ah! this is he, I'll swear," he added, as a tall youthful figure appeared upon the terrace.

It was Clarence. He had been in the garden, and hearing the arrival of the new comers, was returning to the house. As he approached, Rainald scrutinised him with a critical eye. There was no want of breeding about the young fellow, the captain thought, and if his manner was a little boorish, it was wholly free from awkwardness and embarrassment. There could be no question about his good looks. While noting all this, Rainald felt — he didn't exactly know why — repelled by the young man. On his part, Clarence was similarly influenced, but in a much stronger degree, for the moment he set eyes upon the tall and graceful figure of the young officer, he knew it must be his rival, and conceived an aversion to him.

Just before Rainald came up, Mr. La Hogue, who had dismounted and given his horse to the groom, hurried forward, and, whispering to Rainald that it was Sir Hugh's nephew whom he saw, went through the ceremony of introducing the young men to each other. This interference was displeasing to Clarence, and made his manner appear so stiff and cold that he sank greatly in the estimation of the polished officer of hussars. "Nature has done a good deal for him, but he is sadly deficient in manner," thought Rainald. And as he allowed the opinion to be rather too plainly expressed in his looks, Clarence read it there, and at once set him down as a supercilious puppy. Under these somewhat unfavourable

circumstances the introduction took place. The young men shook hands, and after a few words of common civility drew back from each other, and it was rather a relief to Rainald when La Hogue proposed that they should go into the house.

Meanwhile, Major Trevor had been standing on the steps with Jodrell, and availed himself of the opportunity of questioning the old butler about the Serchial Madeira and Sir Christopher's port.

"Ah, sir!" exclaimed Jodrell, "Mr. Mainwaring likes both of those wines. Many a bottle of Roritz port has he crushed in this house, and Sir Christopher — he was the late baronet, sir — used to say that there wasn't so good a judge of port wine in the kingdom as Mr. Mainwaring."

"I dare say Sir Christopher was no bad judge himself," remarked the major.

"Not equal to Mr. Mainwaring, sir. You shall taste the Roritz port and the old Madeira, and any other wines you may choose, for we have a famous cellar, thanks to Sir Christopher."

"I'm delighted to hear it, Mr. Jodrell," observed the major. "I leave the choice of the wines entirely to you. Serve me as you would Mr. Mainwaring."

"Then you must stick to the Roritz port, sir."

"Don't omit claret altogether, my good friend. Captain Fanshaw is not a port-wine man."

"Never fear, sir," replied the old butler. "I can suit all tastes."

By this time the others had come up, and the major in his turn was introduced to Clarence. In this case there was no antagonistic feeling, so they got on very well together, and the whole party went in.

V.

What Mrs. Mansfield thought of the Captain.

AFTER they had inspected the martial implements and knightly accoutrements with which the entrance-hall was bedecked, the newly arrived guests were conducted up the great staircase by Jodrell. On reaching the principal corridor they were met by Mrs. Mansfield, who, though strongly prejudiced, as we know, against Captain Fanshaw, desired to see what he was like; and now that he stood before her, she was rather vexed than otherwise that she could not find fault with his personal appearance.

"So you are Mrs. Mansfield," said the handsome captain, regarding her with a look of great interest, whether feigned or real we won't pretend to determine. "I must shake hands with you, my dear madam — I must, upon my soul. I've often heard Lucetta speak of her dear old Goody — that's her pet name for you, eh? She sends her love to you, and would have sent something more, I'm quite sure, if she could have trusted me with it. Do you know, Mansfield," he continued, looking hard at her, "I felt quite jealous of you; but now I perceive what a nice old body you are, upon my soul I don't wonder

at Lucetta's fondness for you. I shall become very fond of you myself."

"And then somebody else will become jealous," laughed the major.

There was no resisting such an address as this. Rainald had conquered. Mrs. Mansfield could not call up a single frown. Such good nature and good humour as the captain evinced would have disarmed a stronger-minded woman than our old housekeeper. But the captain pursued his victory. When Mrs. Mansfield showed him the room she had prepared for him, and in which a fire was blazing, he detained her, made her sit down, and after talking in rapturous and perhaps extravagant terms of her young mistress — though the language did not seem at all too high-flown to his listener — concluded by explaining to her the object of his visit to Old Court.

Thus treated, thus flattered by being taken into the confidence of her young lady's lover, what could tender-hearted Mrs. Mansfield say and do? Only what she did say and do. She could not belie her conscience, and affirm that she hoped, for her young lady's sake and his own, that the match might take place, but she somehow contrived to persuade Rainald that he had her best wishes for the consummation of his happiness. And, in reality, the good old dame began to feel that the dreams she had indulged in with regard to Clarence were at an end. Now that she had experienced the influence of Rainald's re-

finest and captivating manner, she did not wonder that Lucetta had accepted him, and was forced to admit that Clarence would have had a very poor chance with such a rival, even if matters had not gone quite so far as they had done. Besides, if the decision had rested with herself, instead of with Sir Hugh, she could never have opposed her darling Lucetta's inclinations. Here was the man of the dear girl's choice, and so far as appearances went, a very good choice had been made. No, no — poor Clarence's chance — if he had ever had a chance — was utterly gone.

Little had the good old dame anticipated that such would be the result of her first interview with the handsome captain. Little did she imagine that her loyalty to Clarence would be shaken by a few honeyed words. She went down-stairs to her own room not altogether satisfied with herself, and feeling that her sympathies were enlisted on the wrong side. She went to her own room, we say, and there found Clarence.

"Well, have you seen him, Mansfield?" cried the young man, eagerly.

"Yes, I have just left him," she replied, knowing that he alluded to Captain Fanshaw. "It is just as we suspected. I have heard all about it. He has been telling me of his attachment to your cousin Lucetta."

"She loves him, then?" cried Clarence.

"Yes, yes, she loves him," replied the good woman, deeming it right to crush his hopes effectually. "She has accepted him. I now feel, my dear, that it was very foolish in me — very wrong — to put any notions into your head respecting your cousin. I ought to have known better. But I shan't forgive myself for my folly, if I have caused you any real disappointment. You must not view the matter too seriously. The prize — for my darling young lady is an inestimable prize — which I hoped was reserved for you has fallen into other hands. But that can't be helped. You must reconcile yourself to the loss."

"But I cannot reconcile myself to it," exclaimed Clarence. "Lucetta has obtained complete mastery over me. I know this is madness, or the next thing to it, and that I ought to overcome the feeling, but I cannot. I hate this Captain Fanshaw, who has robbed me of the being whom I feel I could have loved, and who but for him might have been mine. I hate him, Mansfield. I won't meet him again."

As he gave vent to this almost boyish ebullition of anger, the old housekeeper thought him more than ever like his father.

"You must not talk in this way, my dear," she said, in a gentle persuasive voice, and with a kindly maternal look, drawing him as she spoke towards a chair. "There, sit down and listen to me. You have raised your expectations too high, and gone

too fast. But the fault is mine. To lament over impossibilities would be idle, and I am sure you are incapable of such weakness. You must manage to endure Captain Fanshaw's society. The feelings of dislike you entertain for him will speedily wear off. You will find him, I am sure, a perfect gentleman, and I persuade myself you will shortly become great friends."

"Never! Mansfield," exclaimed Clarence, energetically. "Never!"

"Yes you will," she rejoined. "Now, be a good boy, as I used to say to your poor father when he was self-willed, and do as you are bid. Make yourself agreeable to the captain."

"I can't, Mansfield."

"You mean, you won't. But I say you must. All will then be right, and I shall have the consolation of reflecting that if I have acted unwisely, I have made amends for the indiscretion. You won't make me unhappy, I am sure. Promise me not to quarrel with the captain."

"Well, I will promise," replied Clarence, rather reluctantly. "But I won't promise not to quarrel with Mr. La Hogue."

"Don't quarrel with him or with any one else, I entreat," said the kind-hearted old dame. "I have no very exalted opinion of the gentleman in question, from what I hear of him from Jodrell. But a misunderstanding with him might lead to unpleasant

consequences. Don't meddle with him, my dear, but leave Sir Hugh to settle with him on his return."

"You are right," rejoined Clarence. "I will follow your advice."

"It is dictated by real love for you, my dear," said the old dame, with a truly motherly look. "I cannot do all I could wish for you, but I will do the best I can. And now go and look after the guests. Remember, you are your uncle's representative in the house, and act accordingly. Ah! who's there?" she exclaimed, as her quick ears caught the sound of footsteps outside.

No one answered. Mr. La Hogue, however, had been listening at the door, which was left ajar, and had heard all that had passed between the young man and the housekeeper.

Before Clarence came out he was gone. The young man's disappointment at the loss of Lucetta gave him a hint for a slight modification in his plans.

VI.

Temptation.

OUR military friends passed the rest of the day more agreeably than they had anticipated. Accompanied by Mr. La Hogue and Jodrell, they explored the old house, looked at the portraits in the gallery, admired the old furniture in the dining-room, lounged about the library, but did not trouble the goodly tomes upon the shelves. Major Trevor, indeed, wondered who the deuce was going to read all those big books; whereupon Mr. La Hogue shrugged his shoulders, and said he was not the man to do it.

After pointing out several objects which appeared to have a special interest to Rainald, the old butler happened to mention that Miss Chetwynd's portrait was hung up in the room occupied by Clarence, upon which the captain went there at once, and was so charmed with the picture that he took it down, with the intention of conveying it to his own room. Just as he was moving off, Clarence made his appearance, and looked disposed to repossess himself forcibly of the treasure.

"Excuse me," rejoined Rainald, who, though inclined to resent the young man's rudeness, thought

it best to treat the matter as a joke. "I dare say you value the portrait. But I think I have a better title to it than you have. Be so good as to place it in my room, Mr. Jodrell," he added, giving it to the old butler. "Come along, major. Let us go down-stairs."

As they paced along the corridor, he remarked to Trevor that he was afraid he should have to give the young fool a lesson.

Meanwhile, Clarence, irritated with himself for so soon breaking his promise to good Mrs. Mansfield, walked to the farther end of the room, and flung himself into a chair. Thinking his opportunity had arrived, La Hogue whispered to Jodrell to take away the picture, engaging to set all right, and then, closing the door after the butler, went up to the young man.

"I see you are put out, my dear boy, and I understand why," he said. "You have fallen in love with your charming cousin — don't interrupt me, if you please — but you won't gain your object by quarrelling with the captain. I'll show you how to throw him over," he added, with a significant smile.

Clarence looked inquiringly at him, but did not speak.

"Shall I tell you what I would do, if I had a hated rival?" continued La Hogue.

"You would kill him, I suppose?" rejoined Clarence. "Few scruples, I should think, would restrain you."

"No, I wouldn't kill him, but I would get rid of him just as effectually. Captain Fanshaw loves your cousin Lucetta, and feels certain of obtaining her hand. Everything justifies the expectation. The young lady has accepted him — at least, I suppose so — and her father is not likely to refuse his consent."

"Why tell me this? I know it," cried Clarence, impatiently.

"Stop a minute," rejoined La Hogue, with a smile. "There is an obstacle on which the captain has not counted. He has omitted me in his calculations. Safe as he deems himself, he will find that I can thwart him. He is coming in easily, but he won't win. A young untried horse, whom nobody thought worth backing, will beat him."

And he laughed merrily at his own conceit.

"Now listen to me, my dear boy," he continued. "The odds are fearfully against you at this moment; but I'll show you how to beat the favourite. You shall carry off your cousin. You shall wed her, my boy — wed her."

Clarence's flushed cheek and flashing eyes betrayed his excitement, and La Hogue, hastened to improve the effect which he saw he had produced.

"Only say the word," he continued, more earnestly than before, "and I will force Sir Hugh to refuse Captain Fanshaw and give Lucetta to you."

"I doubt your power," said Clarence.

"You doubt it, eh? Well, you shall see. Say the word, and this haughty captain, who would deride your pretensions, shall go back discomfited."

"I should like to mortify him, I own, but not in this way," said Clarence.

"You can mortify him in no other way. He is vulnerable in one point only, my dear boy. Hit him there, or you do nothing. You have too much pluck to let him get the better of you. I see we are agreed," he added, clapping the young man on the shoulder.

"Agreed to what?" demanded Clarence, shrinking from him almost with loathing.

"To act in concert, for the purpose of bringing Sir Hugh to book. The management of the business may be safely left to me, but I shall require your aid. In addition to whatever else you may acquire by the arrangement, you will gain Lucetta and balk your rival. It doesn't appear to require a moment's consideration, but think it over. And now, dear boy, let me give you a word of caution. Play your cards carefully. Don't quarrel with the captain. You may be well content to let him have the picture,

since you will have the original. Meet him in good humour when you come down. You'll soon have your revenge."

With this, he relieved Clarence of his presence.

VII.

Dinner, and a little Écarté after it.

ON going down-stairs, La Hogue found that the two officers had walked out into the garden in order to smoke a cigar, and he presently joined them there. Captain Fanshaw was talking to Simpson, the head gardener — a very intelligent man, and an especial favourite with Lucetta — who showed them over the hothouses and greenhouses, and, while exhibiting many rare and beautiful plants, talked a great deal about his young mistress, and her fondness for flowers. The garden investigated, the party repaired to the stables and looked at Sir Hugh's horses, with which the two officers, who were both very good judges, were tolerably well pleased. Unluckily, the pride of the stable, Mazeppa, was in Brighton, with two other nearly thorough-bred hunters, so they could not be admired. But Drax, who had got his cue, having learnt from the captain that Lucetta had gained the brush with the Southdowns, launched into such a panegyric of her horsemanship, declaring that no young lady in the whole county of Kent could ride like her, that Rainald could not help tipping him handsomely. Thus they beguiled the

flagging hours, until the first bell announcing that it was time to dress for dinner, they returned to the house.

Small as the party was, such a dinner had not been given at the Hall for many years, for Sir Hugh rarely entertained a friend, and lived very simply. On the present occasion, as he had directed that every attention should be paid his guests, Mrs. Mansfield determined to give them a really good dinner — a dinner that should do credit to her master. Accordingly, some of the best of the old family plate was displayed, and very handsome it looked, and very much Rainald and the major admired it — for they both liked old plate. Then, though no disciple of Francatelli, the cook was far from deficient in skill, and, under the guidance of Mrs. Mansfield, produced a series of old-fashioned dishes, very different from the everlasting French entrées — the *noix de veau* — the *filets de bœuf piqué* — the *canetons aux petits pois* — the *vols au vent à la béchamel* — the *salmis*, the *sautés*, the *timbales*, *soufflés*, the *croquenbouches*, and the *plombières*, to which the two officers were accustomed at the grand dinners at Brighton — but all excellent of their kind, and a very agreeable change to men tired of *cotelettes de lièvre*, *dindes en daube*, and *galantines*. Major Trevor, indeed, who was no bad judge, declared he had rarely dined so well. And yet the cook had only the resources of a large country-

house to apply to. To be sure, there was plenty of mutton, poultry, and game, and even a cochon de lait, ready for the spit, so what more could be desired. Jodrell took care that the best wine the cellar afforded should be produced. The Serchial Madeira was introduced at the right moment, and Sir Christopher's old Roritz port elicited the fastidious major's unqualified approbation. There was no mistake about it, he said, and he only wished they had a good stock of it at the mess. As a matter of curiosity, and perhaps to please Jodrell — for he wished to stand well in the old butler's good graces — Captain Fanshaw tried this famous wine, but he quickly deserted it for the claret, which was Lafitte of the first growth. In other respects, the dinner passed off pleasantly enough. Mr. La Hogue talked about racing and steeple-chasing at Paris, Chantilly, Dieppe, and Baden-Baden, and related a good many anecdotes which amused his hearers. Major Trevor, who was of a jovial turn, rattled away very easily and agreeably, so that there was no flagging in the conversation. Even Clarence was not proof against Rainald's refined and prepossessing manner, and took quite a liking to the cheery major. As his ill humour wore off his manner improved, and Rainald thought that something might be made of him in time.

After a while, the party adjourned to the back part of the house, where a comfortable smoking-room

had been improvised by Jodrell. Here they not only smoked, but played a little écarté, cards having been provided for them by the obliging old butler. The major piqued himself, and with good reason, on his play, but he was no match for Mr. La Hogue, and lost five-and-twenty pounds to that personage, who proved to be an adept in the game. Rainald was equally unsuccessful — in fact, the luck seemed to be entirely on Mr. La Hogue's side.

Clarence withdrew as soon as the cards were introduced, not liking to confess that he could not play. His education had been somewhat neglected, Mr. La Hogue observed.

It was quite the witching hour when the others retired to rest, and as they passed through the gallery, the grim old family portraits seemed to frown upon them for their unlicensed intrusion.

If Rainald formed any such fancies they were dispelled by the sight of Lucetta's portrait, which he found in his room. Whatever her ancestors might do, *she* seemed to smile upon him, and so sweetly, that he could not help pressing his lips to the picture.

Need we inquire of whom he dreamed?

VIII.

A Second Telegram from Lucetta.

RAINALD was awakened next morning by Pigot, and his first thought being of the portrait, he directed his eyes towards the spot where he had placed it overnight, but not discerning it, he questioned Pigot, who informed him that he had seen it, not many minutes ago, in Mr. Clarence Chetwynd's room. All the household, we may incidentally mention, had agreed — at Mrs. Mansfield's request — to give the young gentleman that designation. Very much surprised, and rather angry, the captain wanted to know how it came there, but this was more than Pigot could explain.

“Mr. Clarence was just as much surprised as you appear to be, captain, when he found it,” said the footman. “The ghosts seem to be playing strange tricks just now. The night before last both doors of Sir Hugh's bedroom were locked inside — nobody could tell how — and now a picture flies from one room to another without anybody touching it. Very mysterious, ain't it, captain?”

“Not in the least mysterious, man,” rejoined Rainald, sharply. “I have my own opinion as to

the way in which the trick has been performed. Ghosts don't amuse themselves by carrying off pictures. Step to Mr. Clarence Chetwynd's room, and bring back the portrait directly."

"Sorry I can't do it, captain," rejoined Pigot, with difficulty repressing a laugh. "Mr. Chetwynd has just gone out, and has locked his door."

Happily, our armies no longer swear terribly in Flanders or anywhere else, or Rainald, who was greatly exasperated by the information, might have given vent to a few well-rounded oaths. As it was, he sent for Jodrell, and he could not have adopted a wiser course, for the old butler presently answered the summons, and brought with him the missing portrait. Clarence, it appeared, on going out, had left the key of his room with him, and Jodrell was thus enabled to appease the captain's anger by bringing back the treasure. However, he declared positively that Mr. Chetwynd had had no hand in the mysterious affair, and that if a practical joke had been played, that young gentleman was not the actor.

When Rainald went down-stairs, after completing his toilette, he found the major and La Hogue in the dining-room, where the breakfast equipage was set out, and they both laughed immoderately on hearing of the mysterious abstraction of the portrait. Their merriment had not ceased when Clarence came in. He looked grave, but, when rallied by

the major, felt that the incident was too absurd to be treated seriously, and laughed like the others. As to Rainald, though by no means satisfied, he thought it best not to trouble himself further about the matter. When Mr. La Hogue had done laughing, he expressed his firm conviction that Clarence was a somnambulist, and Rainald began to think that this was the true solution of the difficulty.

So many good things had been provided by Mrs. Mansfield for breakfast, that their discussion took up a long time, but the repast being at length ended, havannahs became the order of the day, and it was very well that Sir Hugh did not see the party while thus employed upon the terrace, or his peace of mind might have been grievously disturbed. By this time Rainald began to feel quite at home at the old place, and told the major, as they sauntered along the broad terrace, ever and anon stopping to contemplate some of the beautiful architectural details of the mansion; that he liked the place so much that he should certainly pass three or four months there in every year.

"A month, I should say, would be quite long enough," rejoined the major, who didn't see it in the same light. "Even with a daily allowance of the Roritz port, I should die of ennui in a week. You might manage to spend your honeymoon here, and all that sort of thing, but I shouldn't advise it.

You'd be dreadfully bored — perhaps even with your wife."

"Impossible, major!" cried Rainald. "Lucetta would make a wilderness enchanting. My only misgiving is in regard to Sir Hugh. No getting rid of him, I fear, and not much chance of getting on with him either. Fancy a tête-à-tête dinner with him in that large dining-room. It's too dreadful to contemplate. Yet I have many such before me."

"I can't say I envy you, my dear fellow," rejoined the major. "A father-in-law is a confounded nuisance. If ever I commit matrimony, it shall be with a wealthy widow, without incumbrances, and without father or mother, who are worse than incumbrances. As I am not likely to meet with such a paragon, I don't suppose I shall marry at all. But the thought doesn't afflict me much. Ask me down here for a couple of days — not longer — when you want cheering up. A propos of Sir Hugh, has anything been heard of him this morning?"

"Nothing whatever, so Jodrell tells me. We shall have him here soon enough, no doubt. I wish to Heaven my interview with him were over! I dread it more than I did yesterday."

The party remained for some little time on the terrace, chatting on various matters, and looking about them. The morning was very fine, and

despite the rigour of the season, the park, with its thick groves and long sweeping vistas, looked beautiful — at least, it would have looked so in the eyes of true lovers of nature — but none were there save Clarence, and he was in no mood then for enjoyment of scenery. Though he contrived to maintain a tolerably calm exterior, his breast was in a turmoil, and he looked forward with feverish impatience for Sir Hugh's return, though he could not foresee what would happen then. That a most important crisis was at hand, as far as he himself was concerned, he felt assured, but how others would be affected baffled his powers of calculation. La Hogue's society was almost unsupportable, and even that of Rainald was distasteful to him, but he determined to submit to both annoyances for a time; however, as he had not much practised the art of self-command, he was in constant danger of losing his temper, and, aware of this, he was glad when La Hogue suggested a ride, and the two officers agreed to the proposition. He had then a reasonable excuse for quitting them, and declined to be of the party. Accordingly, a visit to the stables was paid, and a selection from Sir Hugh's stud made, and by-and-by the horses were brought round.

Just as the cavaliers were about to mount, a messenger was descried galloping up the ascent to the Hall, and as he might bring a telegram from Sir Hugh, it was thought advisable to await his

arrival. In a few minutes the man came up, and proved to be the bearer of a telegraphic despatch for Mrs. Mansfield. Jodrell at once carried off the letter, but presently returned, saying that Mrs. Mansfield desired to speak with Captain Fanshaw, whereupon Rainald immediately accompanied him to her room. Apologising for the liberty she had taken in sending for him, but persuaded he would excuse her, the old housekeeper showed him the telegraphic message, which was from Lucetta, and ran as follows:

"Papa has just started from Brighton. I am coming by next train with Lady D. Send the carriage to meet us at Edenbridge."

"I do not desire to alarm you, sir," replied Mrs. Mansfield, "but I fear something has gone wrong. What it is I can't pretend to say, but it is certain that Miss Chetwynd and her aunt deem their presence necessary here, or they would not follow Sir Hugh so quickly. Lady Danvers, I am sure, would not have come at all, unless compelled. Most likely Sir Hugh is unaware of their design, or he would have escorted them; at least, I fancy so. My belief is that this message, though addressed to me, is sent as a caution to you, sir. Unless I am mistaken, my dear young lady evidently fears that some misunderstanding may occur between you and her father, and wishes to put you on your guard.

If I may venture to advise, I would recommend you not to see Sir Hugh until after her arrival."

"I am quite sure you are right, Mansfield, and I will act as you advise," replied Rainald. "I won't return from the ride I am about to take till the ladies have returned."

"You might meet the carriage," said Mrs. Mansfield. "You know the road to Edenbridge. You came from the station yesterday."

"An excellent suggestion. I'll do it," cried Rainald.

He then left the room, and returned to the party assembled at the door, who were curious to know the purport of the telegraphic message. On learning that Sir Hugh was expected, and that Miss Chetwynd and her aunt were coming by the next train, Mr. La Hogue made an excuse for not joining the equestrians. As the officers were not particularly desirous of his company, this made no difference whatever to them, so they set off without him, attended by the groom.

END OF VOL. I.

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My dear mother
I have just received your letter of the 11th
and am glad to hear from you. I am
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Ainsworth, William Harrison

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